

University of Oregon  
**JOHN E. JAQUA LAW LIBRARY**

**BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF ONLINE LEGAL RESEARCH**

**Factors Affecting Choice of Research Tool**

- Researcher's knowledge and experience in law
- Accessibility of tool relative to others
- Familiarity and comfort with particular tool(s)
- Speed required
- Currency required
- Formulation of research question(s)
- Scope of research
- Cost
- Curiosity level
- Mood!

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Print Sources**

- Easier to sort out what's not needed
- Judgment of human expert
- Lay-of-the-land easier to determine

But...

- Error by indexer/editor
- Facts generally not well indexed
- Relevant terms buried as "sub-subheading"
- Index terms may be too broad

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Sources**

- Full-text searching
- Isolation of informational fields
- Pieces of information still useable (even wrong information!)
- Allows for sophisticated search queries
- Currency

But...

- Ambiguous terms create "noise"
- Common words create "noise" (even relevant ones)
- Synonymous words/concepts easy to miss
- Complex terms/settings hard to convey

### **Good Scenarios for Print Tools**

- Many synonyms required to retrieve all relevant documents
- Generic or ambiguous keywords are involved
- Complex concepts/theories are involved
- Too much found through other means
- Any other time you need help from editor or other intermediary

### **Good Scenarios for Online Tools**

- Unusual keywords are involved
- Unusual facts are involved
- Narrow research question
- New area of law
- Information not yet (or maybe not ever) available in print
- Mindless, “batch” research (tracking cites, headnotes, etc.)
- Only information you have is not accessible by print tools (e.g. not indexed)
- Need for manipulating output (e.g. marking text to download)
- Comprehensive coverage required (e.g. all jurisdictions)
- Whenever you can’t trust the work of the editor or other intermediary

This publication will be made available in accessible formats upon request to the Associate Law Librarian, 346-1650.

12/06 an