

A Brief Guide to Finding Court Documents

This guide is meant to be a starting point for public librarians when helping people find cases or other court documents. The information below should be seen as a guideline, not a hard and fast rule. In reality, many factors can apply. When in doubt, call Courthouse Libraries BC for help at **604.660.2841** or **1.800.665.2570**. The CLBC website for the public **Clicklaw** <http://.clicklaw.bc.ca> provides [links to court websites and to CanLII](#).

What Library Patrons Might Ask You	What You Might Ask Them	Where the Patrons' Answers May Lead You
I saw this case mentioned on the news last night. How do I find it?	Did the news say there was a decision or is the case still going on?	<p>“Case”, in this instance, means the reasons for a judge’s decision, at the end of the trial. If the case is still being heard there won’t be anything to find.</p> <p>If there has been a decision, try the Courts’ websites or the CanLII website (for cases from other provinces or one of the territories)</p>
I’ve looked on the Courts’ website and on CanLII and I can’t find this case.	How old is the case?	<p>It may be too old. Currently, BC Supreme Court and Court of Appeal cases from 1990 to the present are on the Internet. For older cases refer the patron to the Courthouse Library.</p> <p>It may be too new. It can take anywhere from a day to 2 months for a decision to be posted on the Courts’ websites.</p>
The case was 5 years ago, why can’t I find it?	Was there a jury?	If the case was decided by a jury there won’t be anything to find since juries do not give reasons for their decisions. Try newspaper reports for more information on a case.
It wasn’t a jury, it was a Judge that heard the case. Why isn’t it on the web?	What was the court level? Provincial Court, Supreme Court of B.C., B.C. Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of Canada?	The BC Provincial Court (lowest court) only posts selected decisions from 1999 onward on the Internet. The higher courts include more of their decisions, but not all. If it’s from the higher courts, contact the Courthouse Library for help. The patron can also go to the courthouse registry where the case took place and ask to see the file. There is a charge for this.
Are court files public?	Were minors involved? Was it a family case?	Not everything in court files is public. While reasons for judgment are made available, most other documents in youth, family and criminal files are only open to the individuals involved in the case.

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How do I find someone's Criminal record?	Do you mean whether someone has ever been arrested or whether they've been to court and been convicted of something?	<p>Police arrest records are not public.</p> <p>If the person was arrested and went to court there may be a decision and it may be available on the internet.</p> <p>However, if the person pled guilty, if it was a jury verdict, or if the judge gave the decision orally in the court, then the registry will have a record of the end result, but there will be no decision posted on the internet.</p>
I am looking for a specific case.	<p>What do you know about the case?</p> <p>The patron shows you the following: Brown v. Bryant, (1979) 11 B.C.L.R. 364</p>	<p>Brown v. Bryant is the name of the case, also known as the style of cause. If this is the only information they have, they can try searching by name on CanLII or on the Courts' websites. If they can't find the case, they need to find more information, such as where and when the case took place. They can return to their source or check newspaper reports.</p> <p>(1979) 11 B.C.L.R. 364 is the citation. If they have this information it tells you that the case is too old for the internet. It also tells you that the case is published and can be found in Volume 11 of the <i>British Columbia Law Reports</i>, at page 364. The patron will need to go to a law library to get a copy.</p>
I am looking for my divorce papers.	When were you divorced?	<p>If it was recent, the courthouse where the divorce took place will have the divorce order. If it was before 1983, the patron can contact the BC Archives.</p> <p>If it was after 1968, or elsewhere in Canada, the patron can contact the Central Registry of Divorce Proceedings in Ottawa.</p>
How do I find settlements?	Do you mean when the parties come to an agreement out of court or are you referring to how much money someone may get for an injury?	<p>If they mean an out of court settlement: the court registries will have a record that a case was settled, but will not necessarily have the details as it is an agreement between the two parties. Often 'non-disclosure' is part of the agreement.</p> <p>If they mean they want to know how much someone may get for an injury, such as a broken arm or whiplash, they can search for cases on the CanLII website that deal with that type of injury.</p>

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<p>Can you help me find the transcript of this trial?</p>	<p>Do you want to know what was decided and why, or do you want to read everything that was said in the courtroom?</p>	<p>The decisions on the Internet are the judges' reasons for judgment. They summarize the case and explain the decision that was reached.</p> <p>The transcript is the verbatim account of everything that was said in the courtroom. Transcripts are not on the Internet; they have to be ordered from a private contractor and are often quite expensive. The registry staff in the courthouse where the trial took place can tell the patron which company or individual to contact.</p> <p>At the Vancouver registry, you can make an appointment to listen to recordings of court proceedings.</p>