

Westlaw NZ

Advanced tips for Searching Case Law

Citation Styles

Thomson Reuters uses the file number style for cases as specified in the NZ Law Style Guide.

Over the years, there have been a number of different file number styles, which is why discrepancies can occur between the citation you have and what is listed in the databases. Often, it is necessary to take the extra zero off the last group of numbers – this applies to FAM, ENV, CIV and CRI cases.

For instance - **FAM 2010-057-0322** would be **FAM 2010-057-322**

Family cases can also be difficult to find when they have been anonymised. An example of this is **SH v DW, Family Court, Waitakere, FAM 2008-004-0214**. That case is listed in BriefCase and Family Cases as Hamilton v Wilson. So in that instance, if you remove the extra zero from the citation – **FAM 2008 004 214** – you will now find it.

Symbols in Citations

It is recommend that you remove all symbols from a citation – dashes, slashes, brackets etc. See examples below. Westlaw NZ is not case-sensitive

CIV-2012-404-95	[2014] NZHC 318	[2016] NZARLA PH 118	(2001) 15 PRNZ 270
civ 2012 404 957	2014 nzhc 318	2016 nzarla ph 118	2001 15 prnz 270

Searching by Legal Classification

If you are searching for a particular type of case eg sale of a house property, then those cases are likely to have the same legal classification. If you know the legal classification – in this instance it would be *proceeds of sale* - then you can use that term to narrow your search to only that type of case (see below):

1. On your home page, click on the Cases search template on the left of the screen
2. Into the Classification field, enter *proceeds of sale* (Westlaw NZ will present an existing set of legal classifications)
3. Click on the one you want
4. Click the Search button

The screenshot shows the 'Classification' search field with a dropdown menu. The selected item is 'Family law > Matrimonial property > Matrimonial home > Proceeds of sale'. Other visible options include 'Family law > Relationship property > Family home > Proceeds of sale', 'Mortgages > Mortgagee's remedies > Sale under power > Proceeds of sale', and 'Real property > Torrens title > Mortgages, charges and encumbrances > Powers and remedies of mortgagee > Sale > Proceeds of sale'. A callout box points to the selected item with the text: 'Then click on the relevant titles you want to include in your search (you can choose more than one)'.

Sometimes you may happen across just the classification you want while looking through other cases. If you see a classification, and you want to find all other cases that have that same classification, just click on it. See following diagram.



Searching cases for phrases or “word strings”

A common scenario is that you come across a quotation in a publication – it might be an Alert 24, or another case – and you want to find other cases that contain that same turn of phrase. For instance, you might find this phrase somewhere -

...did not always constitute “**significant financial hardship**” under early...

- and you want to find more cases containing that same phrase, so you copy/paste that phrase into the free text field.

In the process of copy/pasting from one document to another, especially ones that contain symbols of some kind, computer systems often recognize those symbols differently. In this instance, the quote marks change from “straight quotes” to “smart quotes”. This will mean you don’t get a search result.

To fix this, you just need to delete the quotes and re-insert them as usual.

Searching cases for exact phrases

If you search for a phrase such as “court of record”, Westlaw NZ will also present results such as “court must record” or “court file records” – which isn’t helpful if you want the exact phrase.

Westlaw has a series of stop words – the word “of” is one of these, where it will present further results – this can be helpful on occasion, but not always.

To get the exact phrase, enter “court #of record” – what you are doing here is adding the hash symbol within your phrase to force the system to search for the exact phrase only.