Guide to Legal Citation

This guide adopts the style outlined in the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation, 9th Edition, 2018* (also known as “The McGill Guide”). It can be found at the Research Help Desk at both the New Westminster and David Lam campus libraries.

Legislation

Legislation is a law or set of laws introduced by a government and made official by a parliament.

Provincial Legislation – The Statutes of British Columbia

Statutes are published annually at the end of each parliamentary session into annual volumes. Every so often all of the annual volumes are consolidated with all existing statutes into one complete set called the Revised Statutes.

The statutes of British Columbia were last revised in 1996. Any statute in effect at that time is cited to the RSBC 1996, for Revised Statutes of British Columbia, 1996.

Example:  

Treaty Commission Act, Revised Statutes of British Columbia 1996, chapter 461, section 5, subsection 1, cited to the official printed version.

If a British Columbia statute was passed after 1996 and is in an annual volume (also called sessional), it is cited as SBC, for Statutes of British Columbia.

Example:  

Apology Act, Statutes of British Columbia 2006, chapter 19, cited to the official printed version.

British Columbia does not have an official online version of its statutes. An unofficial database is maintained at [www.bclaws.ca](http://www.bclaws.ca). Whenever possible, cite to the official printed version.

Provincial statutes are available in electronic databases, such as CanLII, QuickLaw and BC Laws (only BC statutes). If citing to an electronic database such as these, put CanLII, QL or BCLaws in brackets at the end of the citation.

Example:  
*Parental Responsibility Act*, SBC 2001, c 45, s 2(1), (BCLaws).

Parental Responsibility Act, Statutes of British Columbia 2001, chapter 45, section 2, subsection 1, found in BC Laws.
Federal Legislation – The Statutes of Canada

The Statutes of Canada were last revised in 1985. Any statutes in effect at this time will be cited as the RSC 1985, for Revised Statutes of Canada. The chapter number includes the initial letter of the name of the act.

Example: Privacy Act, RSC 1985, c P-21.

Privacy Act, Revised Statutes of Canada 1985, chapter P-21, cited to the official printed version.

If a federal statute was passed after 1985, it is cited as SC for Statutes of Canada. In this case, chapters are indicated by numbers only, with no initial letters. If citing a section of an act, add the section number at the end.

Example: Nunavut Act, SC 1993, c 28, s 5(2).

Nunavut Act, Statutes of Canada 1993, chapter 28, section 5, subsection 2, cited to a sessional volume of the official printed version.

The Government of Canada’s Consolidated Statutes and Regulations are available online at http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/. Statutes are generally updated weekly. As of June 1, 2009, all consolidated acts and regulations on the Justice Laws website are considered to be "official", meaning that they can be used for evidentiary purposes. When an official version of any legislation is in electronic format, the regular format for citing legislation is used. You do not need to indicate the electronic source.

Example: Criminal Code, RSC 1985, c C-46, s 318(1)(a).


The Statutes of Canada are also available online in the CanLII and Quicklaw databases. If citing to a database such as these, which are not an official version, put CanLII or QL in brackets at the end of the citation.

Example: Youth Criminal Justice Act, SC 2002, c 1, s 38(2), (QL).

Since the Charter of Rights is not an independent enactment, it is cited as Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982. This citation is to the official printed version. A citation to the online version would require the same information included above for the Criminal Code.

Note the unusual placement of the Charter section number (section 15) in the following example:

Federal and Provincial Legislation – Bills

Bills originating in the House of Commons are preceded by “C-“. Bills originating in the Senate are preceded by “S-“. When referring to provincial bills, include the jurisdiction.


Case Law

Case law is law established by judicial decision in cases.

Traditional form of legal citation

When citing to a printed law reporter, the traditional form of legal citation requires these elements:

- case name (also known as the style of cause) in *italics*
- v to separate names (indicates language of case is English) in *italics*
- year of decision in round brackets followed by a comma
  [or a comma, then the year of publication in square brackets if the year is needed to identify the book]
- volume number
- standard abbreviation of printed reporter title (i.e. DLR for Dominion Law Reports)
- series number in round brackets, if included
- page
- court abbreviation in round brackets, only if not included in the reporter name


*R v Latimer* is the case name, 1995 is the year of decision, volume 126 clearly identifies the exact volume so the year does not need to be in square brackets, DLR for Dominion Law Reports, 4th *series*, case beginning on page 203, as heard by the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal which is abbreviated Sask CA.
The SCR (Supreme Court of Canada Reports) uses square brackets. Put the comma before the date of the volume. Do not put the (SCC) court abbreviation at the end of the citation, as the name of the court has been included in the reporter name.

Example:  

\[ R \ v \ Chaisson, \ [2006] \ 1 \ SCR \ 415. \]

\[ R \ v \ Chaisson \] is the case name, \[2006\] is the year of publication and needs to be in square brackets because volume 1 does not uniquely identify the book, SCR for Supreme Court Reports, the case beginning on page 415.

Neutral Citation

A neutral citation permits identification of a case independent of a printed reporter. Courts assign the neutral citation when they render a decision. The date of implementation for the neutral citation standard varies for British Columbia courts. In January 1999, the Court of Appeal was the first court in BC to implement the neutral citation standard for judgments in electronic form. The Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation, 9th Edition, 2018 (also known as “The McGill Guide”) lists the implementation date for each court in Appendix B-3.

Neutral citation is simplified and includes only these elements:  

- case name (also known as style of cause) in italics followed by a comma,  
- v to separate names (indicates language of case is English) in italics  
- year or date of decision without any brackets  
- court identifier abbreviated without periods  
- case number - decision or docket number(s)

The court assigns the neutral citation when the decision is rendered, so a very recent case will have only a neutral citation until it is included in a printed reporter. If only the neutral citation is available, it may be used alone:

Neutral citation example:  

\[ Rutledge \ v \ Jimmie, \ 2014 \ BCSC \ 41. \]

In this British Columbia Supreme Court case, Rutledge v Jimmie is the case name, 2014 is the year of decision, BCSC is the court identifier, and 41 is the case number.

A neutral citation should always be followed by a citation to a printed reporter, whenever one is available. This is called a parallel citation.

Parallel citation example:  

\[ R \ v \ Latimer, \ 2001 \ SCC \ 1, \ [2001] \ 1 \ SCR \ 3. \]

This latest appeal of the Latimer case has a parallel neutral citation. The printed reporter citation follows the neutral citation. Note that the comma in the citation to the printed reporter comes directly after the neutral citation, and not after the year of the reporter.

When citing an electronic version of a decision, such as through Quicklaw or another database, it is necessary to include the name of the database or online source. See Appendix E in the McGill Guide for a list of electronic database abbreviations.
Quick Citation Reference Sheet

Statutes

*Criminal Code*, RSC 1985, c C-46.

Name of Act = Criminal Code  
Jurisdiction = RSC (Revised Statutes of Canada)  
Year = in this case, the year of the revision, 1985.  
Chapter # = the chapter in the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, printed version.


Where located, if not an official version = Quicklaw


Name of Act = Parental Responsibility Act  
Jurisdiction = (Sessional) Statutes of B.C.  
Year = in this case, the year of the sessional volume.  
Chapter # = the chapter in the sessional volume for 2001.


Where located, if not an official version = BC Laws

Case Law

*R v Simmons* (1984), 7 DLR (4th) 719 (Ont CA).

Name of case (style of cause) = R v Simmons  
Year of decision = 1984 (**Note that the comma follows the year of the decision.**)  
Volume # = Volume 7 (of the 4th series of the Dominion Law Reports)  
Abbreviated title of the reporting service = DLR (Dominion Law Reports)  
Page # = 719  
Court abbreviation = (Ont CA)

*R v Coulson*, 2003 BCSC 144.

Year of publication of decision = 2003  
Court identifier = BCSC (British Columbia Supreme Court)  
Case number = 144