**What are legal digests?**

- Topical collections of brief case summaries (one paragraph)
- Topics are organized by West’s **Topic and Key Number system**, e.g.:
  - *Wills* is a topic.
  - Validity of wills is Key Number 85, under the Topic *Wills*.
- Key Numbers correlate with West *Headnotes* and are:
  - Subdivisions of West Topics.
  - Published at the beginning of cases in West case reporters.
  - Headnotes are written by West editors, not part of the case itself.
- Cases are organized by court jurisdiction, e.g., 1st Circuit, D.C., Md., etc.
- Useful for case finding.

**The American Digest System, the General Digest**

- Includes all reported cases, state and federal, from 1658 A.D.
- *General Digest* is used for digests of the *American Digest System*
  - It is the original name for the monthly publication of the digest.
  - Digests are now referred to as separate, chronological compilations, e.g.
    - *Century Digest*, 1658-1896
    - *First Decennial*, 1897-1906, through the
    - *Eleventh Decennial*, 2001-2004

**Regional, State and Specialized Digests**

- Some jurisdictions publish digests of cases, e.g., the *District of Columbia Digest*.
- Regional digests include cases from several states, such as the *Atlantic Digest*.
- Some digests are published for special courts, such as the *U.S. Supreme Court Digest*.

**How to Use Digests to Find Cases by Topic and Key Number**

- Start with a collection of terms, i.e., synonyms that describe your topic.
- Find synonyms in the *Descriptive Word Index* to find Topics and Key Numbers.
- Look up the Topic and Key number in the *Decennial* volumes.
  - *Decennials* are in chronological order; Topics are in alphabetical order.
  - *Decennials* are not comprehensive; so look at several *Decennials*.
- Older cases could be just as important as newer cases.
- Write down the case citations, and note the edition of the *Decennial*.
- Find the cases in the reporters.

**How to use Digests When You Have a Party’s Name or Case Name**

- Use the *Table of Cases* volumes for each *Decennial*.
- The *Table of Cases* volumes list cases by name of both plaintiff and defendant.
- The entry will provide the case citation and also the West Topics and Key Numbers from the headnotes of the case.
- To find similar caselaw, look up the Topics and Key Numbers in the *Decennial* volumes.
**Parallel Case Citations**

- Citations to more than one reporter that publishes the case.
- E.g., a case can be reported in a state reporter, such as the *Maryland Reports*, and also in a Regional Reporter, such as the *Atlantic Reporter*.
- The state reporter will be cited first, followed by the Regional Reporter.

**Locations of Digests in the Mason Law Library**

- *American Digest System* (all the *Decennials*): Compact shelving, first two rows, Reading Room
- State Digests: We have only a few, located in the Statutes Section, Reading Room.
- *A.L.R. Digest*: Lower Level, Reading Room, with the *A.L.R.*
- *Digest of the United States Supreme Court Reports*, Lawyers’ edition, Lower Level, Reading Room.

**Reference:**