



Grounding Sources and Free Case Retrieval

From: John A. Kelly

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Re: Grounding sources (statutes, rules of court, local rules) and the free retrieval chain for out-of-plan cases

Companion to items 8 and 10 of the Staff Quick Reference and Section 5 of the policy. Grounding means the tool answers from the actual authoritative text you attach, not from its training data. This appendix is where to get that text, and how to pull case law your research plan does not cover without paying list price for it.

1. Grounding sources

California statutes (all codes). **Source:** github.com/johnakelly-yahoo-com/california-codes | **Notes:** Complete plain-text codes, updated nightly from the Legislature's official bulk data. Download the code file you need and attach it.

California statutes (official). **Source:** leginfo.ca.gov | **Notes:** The official text; the final check for anything filed.

California Rules of Court. **Source:** github.com/johnakelly-yahoo-com/california-rules-of-court | **Notes:** Plain-text Rules of Court, rebuilt nightly from the Judicial Council PDFs. Official text at courts.ca.gov/rules; the final check for anything filed.

County local rules (all 58). **Source:** github.com/johnakelly-yahoo-com/california-local-rules | **Notes:** Plain-text local rules for every county superior court, full sets plus civil-only extracts, July 2026 refresh. For a recently amended rule, confirm the effective date on the court's own site.

Judges' standing orders. **Source:** The court's website, per department | **Notes:** Check every matter; AI provisions are appearing here first in some counties.

The usage pattern is the same for all of them:

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Use only the attached [code file / rule set / rule text] to answer.

Quote the exact language you rely on, with its section number. If the attached material does not contain the answer, say "Not found in the provided source." Do not use outside knowledge or training data.

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Grounded this way, the tool's answer arrives with the quotation and the section number, so checking it takes seconds. Ungrounded, checking it takes as long as doing the research yourself.

2. Free retrieval for out-of-plan cases

Research subscriptions have plan boundaries (a typical California plan covers state and Ninth Circuit or California federal material). A case outside the plan triggers a purchase screen at list prices that can run \$100 per document. Almost every published opinion is available free; the chain below, in order, finds it. This package's own cite-check ran the chain: the Mata and Farris opinions were both pulled free and verified, at no charge.

1. **Verify before you retrieve.** Confirming a citation exists is free even for out-of-plan cases: the Westlaw or

Lexis result list shows the caption, citation, court, and date without opening the document. Note that metadata; it is the yardstick every free copy gets checked against. If a purchase screen appears, back out; opening the document is what incurs the charge.

2. **CourtListener / RECAP** (courtlistener.com, the Free Law Project, nonprofit). Search by case name and court. Published opinions live in the opinions database; district court orders and filed documents often live in the RECAP archive of federal dockets.
3. **The issuing court's own website.** Federal appellate courts post published opinions; the slip opinion from the court is the most authoritative free copy there is.
4. **GovInfo** (govinfo.gov, United States Courts collection) for published federal district opinions not found above.
5. **Google Scholar**, as a locator of last resort: use it to find where a copy lives, not as the copy of record.
6. **Paid, in cost order.** PACER, at \$0.10 per page with a \$3.00 per document cap, is almost always the right paid answer for a federal filing. The research platform's out-of-plan purchase is the last resort, with the responsible attorney's sign-off.

Verify the free copy. Match it against the metadata from step 1: caption, docket number, court, and decided date. A slip opinion will not carry the reporter citation; match on docket number and date instead. File the PDF in the matter file with its source noted.

A caution on AI case-law startups. A growing crop of AI legal research products resells the same free CourtListener and public-archive data with a chat layer on top. Fine as triage; not sources of record. Corpus freshness and completeness are unaudited, and the verification standard for anything filed remains Westlaw, Lexis, or the official source.