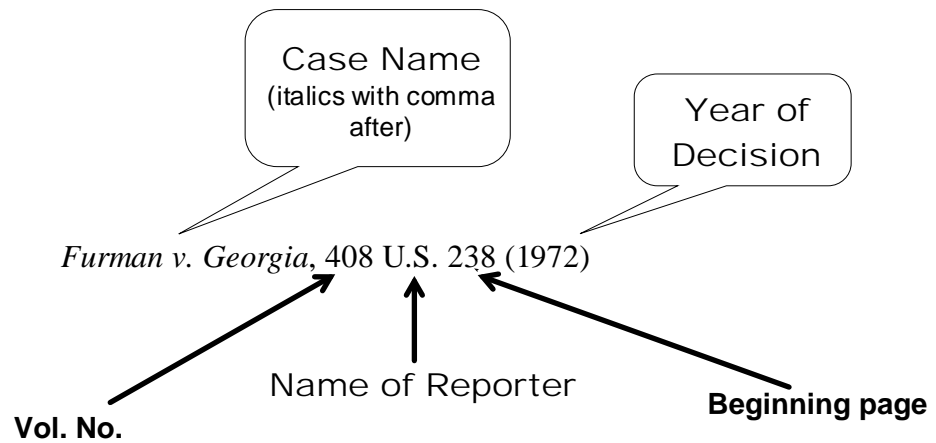


Reading Case Citations



Above are the parts of a standard case citation. The citation tells us that a case called *Furman versus Georgia* was decided in 1972 and can be found in Volume 408 of the *United States Reports*, starting on page 238.

Some Variations

- ★ When using a direct quote from the case, it is important to provide the specific page on which that quote is found. In that case, the citation would have the page added as follows:
Furman v. Georgia, 408 U.S. 238, 240 (1972)
OR
Furman v. Georgia, 408 U.S. at 240 (1972)
- ★ Because federal appeals courts (circuit courts) are found in one of twelve different districts, the specific district is typically added as follows:
Cooper v. Pate, 382 F.2d 443 (7th Cir. 1967)
- ★ Ninety-four federal district courts are spread throughout the country (there is at least one in every state and the more populated states have as many as four). The specific district should be identified:
Howard v. United States, 864 F.Supp. 1019 (D. Colo. 1994)

Case Name

There are typically two names for a case. Usually, the first name identifies who is bringing the court action and the second name is the person against whom action is being brought. In a criminal law case action is almost always brought by the state (e.g., People or State) against a person (e.g., Joe) as in *People v. Joe* or *State v. Joe*.

However, the “defendant” may not always stay the same. In the *Furman v. Georgia* case, Furman was originally the defendant in a murder case being prosecuted in Georgia. However, Furman appealed his conviction and in doing so he became the person taking action against the state.

Year

This is the year in which the decision was delivered by the court. It may not be (and in appellate cases, probably isn't) the year in which the case was heard.

Name of Reporter

A “reporter” is a multi-volume publication where court decisions are found. The full name and abbreviations for the reporters you are most likely to encounter as undergraduates are:

Full Name	Official Abbreviation	Type of Case Reported
United States Reports	U.S.	U.S. Supreme Court
Supreme Court Reporter	S.Ct.	U.S. Supreme Court
Federal Reporter (First through third series)	F., F.2d, and F.3d	Federal Appeals Courts
Federal Supplement (First and second series)	F.Supp, F.Supp2	Important decisions from Federal District Courts
Atlantic Reporter, California Reporter, Northeastern Reporter, Pacific Reporter, etc.	A., Cal. Rptr., N.E., P.	Appellate level state court cases appear in one of the various state or regional reporters.

Volume Number and Beginning Page

Without knowing what volume of the reporter to look in, and what page the case starts on, it would be very difficult to track the case down. Not impossible, however, as you can use the table of cases in digests like West's *United States Supreme Court Digest* or, for very recent cases, *U.S. Law Week*. Similar digests exist for other federal and state cases.

The information for this handout was gleaned from several sources. Especially useful were, *Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law*, by Elias and Levinkind, and from Ferdico's *Criminal Procedure for the Criminal Justice Professional*.