

Short Notes of the Webinar on How to Read Judgments

In this session, law students were introduced to the fundamental aspects of reading and interpreting court judgments, the significance of precedents, and the best practices for legal research. The aim was to help students develop a structured approach to understanding judgments and efficiently using research tools like Manupatra. Below are the key points discussed:

1. **Understanding Precedents:** The **Law of Precedents** was highlighted as a critical concept in the Indian legal system. It refers to the authority of previous judicial decisions, where rulings from higher courts bind lower courts. The difference between **binding precedents** (from higher courts) and **persuasive precedents** (from courts of the same or lower level) was emphasized.
2. **Judicial Hierarchy:** A clear understanding of the court hierarchy is essential for legal research. Judgments from the **Supreme Court of India** are binding on all lower courts, including the High Courts. On the other hand, a ruling from one High Court, while not binding on another High Court, can still be persuasive, meaning it may influence the decision.

Components of a Judgment: When reading a judgment, certain key elements need special attention:

- **Court Name & Citation:** Knowing the issuing court and its jurisdiction is crucial.
 - **Jurisdictional Mode:** It's important to identify the type of case, whether it's a **writ petition, civil appeal, or criminal matter**, as this affects the judgment's applicability.
3. **Significance of Citations:** The importance of **citations** in legal research was underlined. Manupatra's citation system, which provides electronic references, was highlighted as reliable and court approved. Other recognized citations such as **SCR (Supreme Court Reports)** and **AIR (All India Reporter)** were also discussed in comparison.
 4. **Doctrine of Merger:** This principle explains how the **date** of a judgment impacts its authority. Later judgments can supersede earlier ones, creating a hierarchy within judgments that must be navigated carefully. Law students need to stay updated on recent rulings, especially when using precedents in arguments.
 5. **Jurisdiction and Authority:** The session reiterated the importance of knowing the **jurisdiction** of the court issuing a decision. Understanding the type of case (e.g., civil, criminal, or writ) helps determine the authority of the ruling and its binding nature on other cases.

6. **Effective Judgment Reading:** The students were advised against reading entire judgments word for word. Instead, the session encouraged them to focus on extracting the relevant portions, such as the ratio decidendi, holding, and key legal principles, which would save time and improve efficiency in legal research.
7. **Legal Research Tools:** Familiarity with online legal research platforms like **Manupatra** was recommended. The importance of utilizing reliable legal databases for accessing verified judgments and legal materials was emphasized. Additionally, students were encouraged to keep key reference materials, such as the **Indian Constitution, CPC (Civil Procedure Code), and BNSS (Bare Act of the Indian Penal Code)**, handy while conducting legal research.
8. **Using Citations in Courts:** The session stressed that students must understand how different citations (such as SCR or AIR) correspond to Manupatra's citations. This is crucial as **electronic citations** provided by Manupatra are accepted in courts and legal documents.