

Congressional Documents

What They Are...

House and Senate documents function as an historical record of each Congress. There are several different types. Some are special studies and reports, reprints of Presidential messages, executive agency reports, memoranda, reports of nongovernmental organizations and miscellaneous other publications. Sometimes a committee publishes items as Documents that would also be considered prints (see the Research Guide to Locating Congressional Committee Prints). Documents are numbered sequentially within each congressional session (e.g., H.Doc. 99-1).

The Senate issues another type of Document, called the Senate Treaty Document. Prior to 1981, these were referred to as Senate Treaty Documents and rarely published. The documents are published when treaties are submitted to the Senate for consideration. Treaty Documents usually contain the text of the treaty, a message from the President, and a statement by the Secretary of State explaining and analyzing the treaty. Executive/Treaty Documents are also numbered sequentially within a congressional session.

Finding a Document Online

There are several resources available for online copies of congressional committee reports. For recent years (since about 1990) nearly all can be found online. For earlier reports, online availability is possible but should not be expected.

(1) **GPO Access:** The GPO's website has PDF copies of congressional documents dating back to the 104th Congress (1995), as well as many other federal legislative resources.

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/cdocuments/index.htm>
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(2) **LexisNexis Congressional Universe:** This is available to the UF community only, through the library catalog. This database contains text of congressional documents starting in 1990, and abstracts and indexing for documents back to 1970.

The main page has many options for obtaining legislative information (you may want to read through to see what's available) – to search only documents, click the **Advanced Search** tab and check the box for House & Senate Documents.

If you are looking for a pre-1970 report, check the box for **U.S. Serial Set**. This is a set of searchable PDF's fully reproducing the *U.S. Serial Set*, a publication described below.

Finding a Document – 1970 to Present

Congressional Indexing Service (CIS)

The *CIS Index* (located at KF49 .C62 in the Reference area) provides an index to and abstracts of all legislative history information published after 1969. The actual documents are reproduced by CIS on microfiche.

IF YOU HAVE THE DOCUMENT NUMBER

1. Determine the year that corresponds to the congressional session of the document.
2. Use the *CIS Annual Index* volume that covers that year (this may be a set of cumulative indexes for past years – look for the volume that says “Supplementary Indexes”).
3. Look in the table of contents for the “Index of Document Numbers.” This list is organized by session of Congress, then by House, Senate, and Treaty Documents.
4. Locate the document number, and note the CIS abstract number.
5. Look up the abstract number in the *CIS Annual Abstracts* volume for that year. This will give you the title and summary information about the document, including (for documents beginning in 1983) the SuDoc number.
6. CIS microfiche are filed by year, then by abstract number, in cabinets 23-28.

n.b. Some congressional documents are received by the Legal Information Center in paper form. The SuDoc number will help you locate those items. A search in the online catalog by the document's title will indicate if the item is shelved by the SuDoc number or if it is in the regular collection.

BY SUBJECT

1. Using the *CIS Annual Index* volume for the appropriate time period, look for the “Index of Subjects and Names” (for past years the indexes may be cumulative over four-year periods).
2. The CIS abstract number is provided next to the subject.
3. Follow steps 5-6 above.

Finding a Document – Before 1970

U.S. Serial Set

The *U.S. Serial Set* is a publication that dates back to the very beginning of the Congress, in 1789. It contains all sorts of congressional documents plus other documents requested by Congressmen to be published.

The *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* (Reference Z1223 .Z9 C65) covers the period from 1789 to 1969. The microfiche in the Legal Information Center that contains the *U.S. Serial Set* covers from 1909-1969. Documents prior to 1909 are available in the main UF Library (Library West).

LexisNexis Congressional Universe now contains the entire *U.S. Serial Set* online in searchable PDF format. See the ***Finding a Document Online*** section above for more information.

BY DOCUMENT NUMBER

1. Use the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* (Reference Z1223 .Z9 C65). Select the volumes for the desired time period.
2. Use the volume containing “Finding Lists.”
3. Turn to “Numerical List of Reports and Documents.” Take care to be looking in the correct Congress and session.
4. Locate the number of the document.
5. Write down the number to the right of the document number and its title under the heading “serial.”
6. Go to the fiche cabinets that contain the *U.S. Serial Set* (see microform guide in the back of the “Library Maps” binder on the Reference Desk).
7. The microfiche are organized by Congress and session, then by the serial number.
8. The serial number appears on the upper right hand corner of the fiche, e.g. no. 11379. The heading to the left of that number will indicate Report numbers, Congress and Session numbers.

BY SUBJECT

1. Use the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* (Reference Z1223 .Z9 C65). Select the volumes for the desired time period.
2. Use the “Subject Index” volume.
3. Looking under the topic, note the document number.
4. Then pull the volume containing “Finding Lists” and follow steps 3-8 above.

PAPER FORMAT

As mentioned above, the Legal Information Center receives some congressional documents in paper format. Entering the title in the online library catalog will indicate if it is available in our collection. The Marston Science Library at UF receives many congressional documents as well. See the Research Guide to Using Government Publications for more information.

Special thanks to the University of New Mexico Law Library.
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