

# Read the Case — The Whole Case!

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I constantly preach the need to read the whole case once you find that wonderful sound bite by a computer search. But I recently came across some research indicating that jurors follow admonitions in the court's instructions better if they understand the reason for the admonition, and thought the same might be true for lawyers as well. So here is my explanation of why you should read the opinion in its entirety, not just the great sentence you found to quote.

First and foremost, there may be something adverse in the opinion to your position, after the good sound bite, such as an exception that fits your case like a glove. Or the court ultimately may have reached a result different from the one you seek, such that you may not want to rely on the case.

But even assuming there is no such problem with the case, you still should read the entire opinion for multiple other reasons:

1. The court may have used a standard of review that helps your argument in your case.
2. The court may have additional explanations for its ruling that you can use to your advantage.
3. The court may have cited other cases or treatises you have not yet found.
4. In issuing the ruling you tout, the court may have expressly rejected arguments advanced by your opponent. And it may have done so on grounds you previously had not considered raising.
5. The court may have done your job for you and distinguished the cases your opponent cites.

All of this provides ample reasons for you to take the time to read the entire opinion you intend to cite to the court or rely on in an opinion letter to a client. Indeed, it may cause you to decide that the case actually is worth being discussed in text, not merely included in a string cite with the sound bite in a parenthetical.

## Authored By

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