



Presentation 2. - Using E-Search to find Court Records

1. Intro to Using e-search

Script

Welcome to *Using E-Search*. This presentation has been developed by the Law Courts Education Society. It describes how you can use e-search to get information about court records in a civil case. The presentation is broken into six parts. There will be a link to the next part at the end of this video.

Here is the front page of Court Services Online, which provides the e-search service.

This presentation is the second of two presentations on Court Services Online developed especially for people who are dealing with legal matters on their own. The first presentation, also on this website, is *Overview: Court Services Online*.

On the Internet, you can link to Court Services Online by going to <https://webapps.ag.gov.bc.ca/cso>

You can also get to that page by Googleing CSO+Home+BC



2. Intro to CSO front page

Script

There are some things to note on the homepage:

- On the left-hand column, note where the arrow is pointing to “Search Civil”
- In the top right-hand column, note that you need a VISA or MasterCard to use the service. You also need to have Adobe Acrobat on your computer to read the reports.
- Also in the right-hand column, note the menu choices for “First Time Users” – it might be a good idea to explore this section before you enter the site and print off any information you might need.
- Finally, note the arrow at the bottom of the screen that says, “Search Civil Court.”

I’m searching for a civil case, so I’m going to search the court records. I know it’s not a case at the Court of Appeal.

I had a contract with a Mrs. Swimmer to build her a pool. Well, I did just that and she’s been using the pool for the past two years. But she’s refusing to pay me the rest of the money that she owes me. It looks like I might have to go to Supreme Court to get the money – and it’s quite a lot. She owes me over \$50,000.

Right now, I want to see if anyone else has taken Mrs. Swimmer to Supreme Court for unpaid debts.

First thing I’m going to click on “**Search Civil.**”



3. Search Civil Court Intro

By Party Name

Script

The screen that comes up looks like this.

Let's use my example. I'm going to search for a court file. I know the name I want. It's Mrs. Swimmer. I fill in the Last Name. I have to fill in this line because it has an asterisk beside it.

I don't have to put in the first name or the middle name, but I would if I knew for sure what it was and how to spell it. I am pretty certain that her first name is Anna so I'll use the initial "A" and see if there are any Anna's.

I'm going to search **By Party Name** because I know the name of the person. "Party" is the legal term for an individual or organization involved in a court case.

Under **By Party Name** you see the tabs: "individual," "organization," "both." This means that when you are searching by party you can search for an individual or an organization. You can select "both" if you're not sure the party is an individual or an organization.

I know Mrs. A. Swimmer is an individual, so I'm selecting **Individual**.

You can see on the left-hand side of the screen that there are four ways to search files

You can search:

- By Party – that's the name of the person or organization.
- By Deceased name – you might use this if you were searching for a court proceeding about a will
- By File Number – you would need the exact file number to use this one
- By Date range – you can put in a date range of up to a week of when you think the file was opened.

I'm searching by Party Name but you could also search by deceased name, file number or date range.

I've filled in the surname and the initial of the first name.

Then there are places where I can fill in
Location



Level
Class
Party role

- Location: This can be any court registry in BC: I don't know the court location where any case against Mrs. Swimmer might have been filed. But she lives in New Westminster so I will select that location from a drop-down list: New Westminster Law Courts.
- Level: This is the level of court: Provincial or Supreme. I'm interested in Supreme Court because I'm owed over \$50,000. I know that Small Claims is a division of Provincial Court and it only handles amounts of \$25,000 or less. Still I think I'll search both courts to broaden the search.
- Class: This means the type of matter the case is about. I could select cases such as:
 - Bankruptcy
 - Small Claims
 - Divorce
 - Supreme Civil (General)

Maybe I could select Supreme Civil (General), because there isn't any special category for suing someone who hasn't paid his or her debts. But I'm not quite sure, so I'll leave it out for now.

- Party role: This means the person or organization is the applicant or plaintiff or the respondent. I'm not quite sure about the party role so I'll leave it blank.

Remember, the more detail you enter the more you could be limiting your search. Note the "search tips" button – "search tips" answers questions people have about searching.

The form also asks if I want to use a cross-reference. This is just for law firms, so they can cross-refer to their own files. I'll leave that blank, too.

Now I check the screen

- I've got the last name
- The first initial
- I've got the location of the court: New Westminster Law Courts
- That's all I need to start.

I'll click the SEARCH button at the bottom of the screen



4. Payment Required

Script

The next screen that comes up tells me about payment. They want \$6 for my search by Party Name.

This screen also explains what the limitations are, and what information you cannot search for. (See our presentation, Overview: Court Services Online, about what information you can search for and what information you cannot search for).

I click on **Pay Now**.

5. Internet Payment Programs

This screen asks me if I want to pay by Visa or MasterCard. I provide the usual credit card details.

6. Search Results – By Party Name

Script

Now we're getting the first of the search results. The search has brought up 12 entries for an A. Swimmer in the New Westminster Law Courts. [PAUSE] Many of them are family proceedings so I don't have access to them.

But in the middle of the list we can see that there is an Anna Swimmer listed. Charles Swimmer is probably her husband. It says that the level of the court was Supreme Civil (General). That's the category I thought I might select earlier, but I wasn't sure.

I'll ask to view the file details for the date, May 2nd 2004. This will cost me \$6. If I decide after viewing the file details that I want to view another file it will cost me an additional \$6. I'll select May 2nd and click on **View**.



7. View File Details

Script

This screen tells me that on May 2nd, 2004, a person called Charles Swimmer was involved in a case with a company called Loggerhead Landscapes Inc. in the Supreme Court in New Westminster. I know that the landscape company started the case because the company's name is listed first in the **Style of Cause**. This means that the company brought a case against Charles Swimmer. From the previous screen I know that Anna Swimmer is related to Charles Swimmer.

This screen tells me that the case began with a document called a Writ of Summons. This is a document in a civil case that begins a civil court proceeding.

I can see we're getting into legal terms here. If you want to know about what the legal terms mean, there are some useful online resources at the end of this presentation.

You will have noticed that Case Basics is highlighted. But there are also some other items on this screen:

- Parties
- Documents
- Hearings and Results
- Transfers

I'm going to take a look at these. First, I want to know more about who was involved. So I'll click on **Parties**.



8. View File Details – Parties

Script

Here I can see that Loggerhead Landscaping Enterprises Ltd. was the plaintiff (the company that started the court action) and there are two defendants – Anna Swimmer and Charles Swimmer.

I look under Counsel Name to see if the names of the lawyers who represented the parties have been listed. (Counsel is a word for lawyer.) There is no entry for counsel for the Swimmers but there is an entry for Loggerhead Landscaping. This might mean that the Swimmers were not represented in court by a lawyer. But to be certain I would have to go to the registry.

Now I want to know what documents were involved. Documents basically tell the story about what happens in court – all of the decisions made by a court are recorded in court documents. I'll click on **Documents**.

9. View File Details – Documents

Script

This screen lists the documents in order. This screen gives me, in chronological order, a list of all the documents that were filed in court. First I see that the Writ of Summons was filed in Supreme Court at New Westminster on 2 May 2004.

I could look at all of these records but I'm interested in the final document filed with the court, which is the Order for December 8th, 2004. I want to know what the judge ordered in this case.

I'll select the Order for 8 December 2004 and click on **View**.



10 View File Details – Documents – Term of Order

Script

On the screen I can see that on December 8th, 2004, the judge ordered the plaintiff to pay a sum of money - \$33,760.00 to the plaintiff. The defendants, Charles and Anna Swimmer, were ordered to pay the landscaping company.

I might want a copy of the documents listed online. At the end of the presentation I'll tell you how to order a court document online.

Sometimes all I might want to see is the Order. But what if I wanted to see a record of the court hearings that led up to the Order? I can do this by selecting **Hearings and Results**.



11. View File Details – Hearings and Results

Script

This screen tells me when and where the hearing was held: 8th of December at the New Westminster Law Courts. It was an application heard in Chambers. Chambers hearings are held in courtrooms but they are not as formal as a trial. Remember, at the end of this presentation I'll give you links to definitions of what the legal words mean.

The screen also tells me that the hearing was about a Notice of Motion. A Notice of Motion is a legal term for what one of the parties is asking the court to do. In this case the plaintiff (the landscaping company) would be telling the court how much money they were owed and asking the judge to make an order for the defendant to pay it.

The screen also describes what order the judge made (which we've seen in the document called the Order).

This screen about hearings and results will list *all* the hearings in the case. There is often more than one. Don't get confused. They go in chronological order, starting with the most recent.

As for me, I've come to the end of my search. I'm not going to worry about the heading on the screen that said "transfers" because I can see that this case was not transferred to another court.

Before I click "**end search**" there are some other things to consider. I'll explore them now.



12. What's next?

Script

1. *Do I want a file summary report?*
2. *Do I want to purchase a document?*
3. *Do I want to find out what the legal terms mean?*
4. *Do I want to know more about researching my case?*

Now I've viewed the court record I'm interested in, I want to order a **File summary report**. This is going to cost me an additional \$6 dollars.

It will give me a summary of everything I've viewed online in this search.

I can order a file summary report when I've finished my search, before I leave the screens we just visited.

I'll just click on the line that says **File summary report** and follow the instruments for payment.



12.2. Do I want to purchase documents online?

Script

I've decided I also want a copy of that order. I can do that, too. I'll click on **Document Request** on the screen that says **Documents**.

When I select **Document Request**, I'll follow the instructions on how to order the document – it costs an additional \$10 to have a copy of the document sent to me by email or fax.

Another way to do this is to go to the Court Services Online homepage and look in the right-hand column under **First Time Users** – and select **Purchase Documents Online**. This section gives you a step-by-step guide to how to purchase a document online.

12.3. Do I want to find out what the legal terms mean?

Script

I've seen a lot of legal terms in my e-search. To make sure what they mean, I can go to the guide, *Common Supreme Court Terms*. This is on the website of the Law Courts Education Society.

I'll click on the web address for the Law Courts Education Society: www.lawcourtsed.ca

To find the guide I can use the search box in the upper right corner of the website. In the box I can type **Supreme Court Terms** and click on search.

On the page that appears there is a link to **Guidebooks for Representing Yourself**. I'll click on this link.

The next page that appears lists numerous guide books. The one I am looking for is called **Common Supreme Court Terms** near the bottom of the list. I'll click on this link to open the document.

In the document I think I'll look up **Writ of Summons**. Here it is. Writ of Summons: A document that notifies both the court and the people who are being sued that litigation has started.

If you'd like to learn how to search a PDF document then visit our presentation listed below these multimedia presentations.



12.4. Do I want to know more about preparing my case?

Script

If I'm going to sue Mrs. Swimmer for what she owes me for that swimming pool I built her, I'll need a lot more information about going to court by myself.

A good place to start is the **Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre** website. It provides information for people who are going to Supreme Court on their own, or who are thinking about it.

I'll click on the address for the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre.



13. End of presentation

This has been a short guide to using e-search, part of Court Services Online.

To find out more about preparing your own case, you may wish to write down the online addresses of the self-help sites we just visited:

Law Courts Education Society: www.lawcourtsed.ca

Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre: www.supremecourtsselfhelp.bc.ca

You can view the presentations about Court Services Online at any time:
www.lawcourtsed.ca/cso

Good luck with your search, and don't forget, there is help available.

Want to get started with your e-search right away? Just click on the link.

Screen

[Link](#) to Court Services Online