

# LEGAL CITATION OPTIMIZATION

Research backed suggestions to increase the impact of legal scholarship

## Introduction

Here we summarize items other than quality that data indicate increase citations to legal scholarship. Most of these findings come from two papers:

- [How to Increase Citations to Legal Scholarship](#)
- [SSRN's Impact on Citations to Legal Scholarship and How to Maximize It](#)

The sidebars add comparisons to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) studies and an [older study on](#)

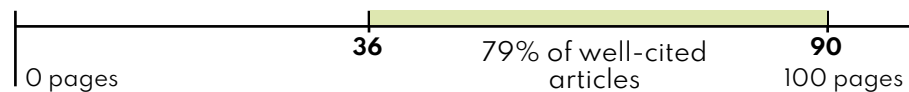
[legal citations by Ian Ayers and Fredrick Vars](#). In most instances, all sources align.

Differences in studies and format help explain where sources diverge. Ayres and Vars found that having a title colon reduced the chances of being in the bottom 10%, not that it helped being in the top. Although similar, abstracts and meta descriptions vary, likely explaining the differing findings in this area.

### TIP ONE

## Write Long Articles

- Well-cited articles had a median of 64 pages (average 63), while less-cited articles had a median of 22 pages (average 27).
- 68 and 66 pages were the most frequently occurring page lengths among well-cited articles.



### SEO Correlation?

**Yes** — Google appears to favor long form content. See p. 176, [OSTLJ article](#).

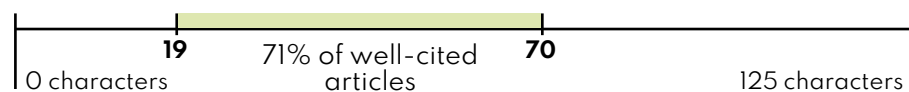
### Ayres & Vars Align?

**Yes** — Total citations increase with article length, peaking at 53 pages. See [abstract](#).

### TIP TWO

## Keep Titles Short

- Well-cited articles had a median of 45 characters (average 52) and 6 words (average 7.3), compared to less-cited articles' 67 character median (average 70) and 10 words (average also 10).
- Only 6.8% of well-cited titles had over 100 characters.



### SEO Correlation?

**Yes** — [Study found](#) top websites have titles between 45-50 characters.

### Ayres & Vars Align?

**Yes** — Articles with shorter titles tend to receive more citations. See [abstract](#).

### TIP THREE

## Avoid Colons in Titles

- Only 32% of top articles had a colon in the title.
- 55% of less cited articles had a colon in the title.
- Ask yourself if you really need both what is before and after the colon. For example, this title probably doesn't need what's before the colon: Presidential Administration: How Implementing Unitary Executive Theory Can Undermine Accountability.

### SEO Correlation?

**Yes** — Google sometimes removes what comes before /after the colon.

### Ayres & Vars Align?

**No** — Title colons reduce probability of falling into bottom 10%. See [page 443](#).

# LEGAL CITATION OPTIMIZATION

Research backed suggestions to increase the impact of legal scholarship

## TIP FOUR

### Consider Legal Search Engines

Google has the best search engine in the world. Legal databases tend to have less sophisticated search engines, that may require more synonyms and other indicators than Google. Consider this when writing, see side bar for an example.

#### Example

Compare Google & Westlaw for results for **determinants of citations journals** and **determinants of citations reviews**.

## TIP FIVE

### Include a Trending Topic

Papers that weave in generally popular topics appear to perform better. As one example:

- Hein's AI tagged 12% of well-cited articles as technology related.
- The AI only tagged 5% of less-cited articles with those topics.

Top SEO tool for analyzing popularity: [Google Trends](#).

#### SEO Correlation?

**Yes** — Google clearly favors hot topics and there are SEO tools to assess.

#### Ayres & Vars Align?

**Yes** — Found that some legal subjects get more citations. See [page 437](#).

## TIP SIX

### Post to SSRN Early

- 87% of top articles had equivalent SSRN postings.
- Only 44% of less-cited articles had SSRN equivalents.
- 95% of top articles were posted before or in the same year they were published in a journal.
- 76% of less-cited articles met the same criteria.

#### More Details

Posting to SSRN is likely even more advantageous than posting to an open-access journal: (1) SSRN's scale means broader reach, and (2) SSRN allows you to post immediately, when your paper matters most.

## TIP SEVEN

### Write Longer SSRN Abstracts

- Papers in the well-cited group had a median abstract length of 264 words, compared with less than 225 words for the less-cited groups.
- The longest abstract in the well-cited group was 730 words, and SSRN will request revisions for abstracts over 1,000 words.



#### SEO Correlation?

**No** — Google appears to favor [shorter meta descriptions](#).

#### Ayres & Vars Align?

**NA** — They did not study abstract length.

## Suggestions & Questions

Questions? Comments? Ways to improve this document? Please reach out to Rob Willey ([rwilley@gmu.edu](mailto:rwilley@gmu.edu)).