

Reading a Case

Law

Extracting what matters from a judgment efficiently.

A repeatable method.

1

Read the headnote

Orientation only — never cite it as authority.

2

Identify the material facts

The facts the decision actually turned on.

3

State the legal issue

The question the court had to answer.

4

Find the decision

Who won, and on what basis.

5

Extract the ratio

The reasoning necessary to that outcome.

6

Note dissents and obiter

Persuasive, and often the seed of later change.

Educational reference. A case brief that omits the material facts is unusable: the ratio only makes sense against them.