AI for Legal Research: Tools, Tips, and Examples

Written by Damien Riehl

Legal research is the foundation of nearly every case, yet it remains the biggest bottleneck in a lawyer's day. The pressure of digging through case law under tight deadlines creates the risk of missing something that matters.

Now, AI is helping firms turn that bottleneck into an advantage. Modern AI legal research tools can surface relevant information faster and more accurately, reduce manual review, and give lawyers back hours they can spend on strategy and clients.

Many firms remain curious but cautious—especially when it comes to AI reliability, data security, and ethics. Yet adoption is accelerating: according to the latest *Legal Trends Report*, 79% of legal professionals are already using AI within their firms. Legal research AI, in particular, is helping firms uncover insights more efficiently and focus on higher-value work.

So what does this shift actually look like in practice?

In this guide, we break down how legal research AI is evolving, how to use these tools safely, and which solutions are worth knowing.

Ready to accelerate your legal research? Clio Work brings matter-aware, trusted analysis directly into your workflow. Start your free trial today.

What is AI for legal research?

AI for legal research applies technologies—like natural language processing (NLP), large language models (LLMs), and automation—to help lawyers quickly use plain-language queries to surface relevant case law, statutes, regulations, and commentary. These tools make it easier to find the information that matters without manually reviewing hundreds of legal documents.

To understand how these tools work, consider the key AI technologies powering legal research today:

- **Natural language processing (NLP):** Interprets queries in plain language. Instead of requiring complex Boolean operators, NLP allows lawyers to pose research questions conversationally.
- **Large language models (LLMs):** Use vast datasets, including case law and court decisions, to generate context-aware results, summarize complex text, and highlight relevant sections for review.
- **Automation:** Surfaces, sorts, and prioritizes relevant documents efficiently, handling repetitive tasks like running queries across new filings or categorizing discovery documents.

What does this mean for small and mid-sized firms? Smaller firms competing with larger practices can streamline legal work, using AI to stay competitive, better meet client expectations, and grow their business.

Leveraging technology helps smaller firms compete on equal footing with larger practices, reducing manual work, speeding up response times, and allowing attorneys to focus on higher-value tasks: strategy, argument preparation, and client advice.

AI legal research tools to consider in your practice

There are many AI tools for legal research, but few truly stand out. Here are four AI legal research tools every lawyer should know.

Clio Work

What it does: Clio Work is the only AI built to understand your cases, their facts, your business, your practice areas, and the law. By uniting Vincent AI and the Clio Library with your matter data, Clio Work delivers precise, cited research, intelligent insights, and next-step guidance directly inside your practice management workflow. Instead of toggling between tools, Clio Work becomes the brain of your entire system, helping you work faster, think more clearly, and stay ahead.

Strengths and differences: Clio Work goes far beyond generic AI. It is trained on trusted legal sources and grounded in the 1B+ documents available through the Clio Library, ensuring accurate, citable answers rather than hallucinations. It instantly summarizes case files, surfaces relevant statutes and precedent, and interprets documents in the context of your active matters. And because it operates inside Clio's secure platform, your data stays private and never trains external models.

Combined with Clio's leading workflow, communication, billing, and automation tools, Clio Work eliminates the fragmentation that drains cognitive bandwidth, reducing administrative cognitive load by up to 25%. Growing firms using AI in Clio already see higher revenue, faster task completion, and stronger client satisfaction.

Who it's best suited for: Clio Work is built for solo, small, and mid-sized firms that want enterprise-grade legal AI, without the cost, complexity, or fragmentation of stitching together multiple third-party tools. These firms can scale efficiently with matter-aware summaries, accurate cited research, and intelligent task prioritization, all embedded directly within their daily workflows.

Larger firms can also take advantage of Vincent by Clio and the Clio Library, which are available through our enterprise offering. Those larger firms get access to trusted, cited legal research and advanced AI-powered insights, while continuing to operate within Clio's secure, extensible system tailored specifically for enterprise-scale workflows.

Learn more about Clio Work

Clearbrief

What it does: Clearbrief, one of the Clio Integration Awards Winners 2025, is an AI-powered tool that streamlines citation and document cross-referencing directly in Microsoft Word, syncing discovery files through Clio Manage.

Strengths and differences: Most legal advice is applying facts to law—and Clearbrief analyzes facts. It can instantly suggest relevant pages from depositions and documents, verifies citations, and links facts to evidence—ensuring accuracy while drafting briefs and memos. Its "Add Cite" feature inserts properly formatted citations in seconds, saving hours of manual work.

Who it's best suited for: Litigation teams and attorneys who spend significant time drafting briefs and managing citations, particularly in small to mid-sized firms looking to save time and reduce errors in legal writing.

Legora

What it does: Legora offers AI assistance for drafting, summarizing, and generating language, functioning similarly to general-purpose AI models, with an added application layer.

Strengths and differences: Legora can help improve efficiency by producing text, organizing ideas, and responding to natural-language questions. However, for most jurisdictions, Legora doesn't contain the primary law. It lacks jurisdiction-specific cases, statutes, regulations, and other authoritative legal sources. Like general AI models (e.g., ChatGPT), it can't provide the latest cases,statutes, or regulations, and it doesn't recognize "bad law" (e.g., overruled cases). As a result, it may generate answers that sound authoritative but don't include primary legal authority.

Who it's best suited for: Firms seeking lightweight language assistance or drafting support, but not cited legal research or matter-aware insights. Because it lacks legal authorities, Legora requires lawyers to use *another* tool to find those authoritative sources. This makes itbetter suited as a general-purpose writing helper than for researching and writing briefs, pleadings, motions, and legal memoranda.

What to look for in an AI legal research tool

To help ensure your firm gets the benefits of AI without compromising quality, compliance, or client trust, consider the following factors when evaluating AI tools for legal research:

- **Cases, statutes, and regulations:** Prioritize tools with comprehensive, up-to-date, jurisdiction-specific primary law coverage—so answers reflect binding authority, not outdated snapshots.
- **Accuracy and reliability:** Look for tools that provide cited, verifiable legal authority, not just summaries. Frequent updates and high-quality datasets matter.
- **Security and confidentiality**: The platform should use strong encryption, protect client data, and shouldn't use your firm's information to train public models.
- **Ethical data governance:** Choose tools that clearly explain how data is stored, used, and retained, with transparent privacy policies.
- **Workflow integration:** The best tools connect seamlessly with your practice management system and document workflows—so you don't need to switch between platforms.
- **Ease of use:** Intuitive, low-friction tools help teams adopt AI quickly and get value immediately.

Real-world examples of AI in legal research

AI is no longer a theoretical tool for the future of legal research. Today's lawyers are already using it in practical ways to save time, reduce errors, and gain strategic insights when conducting legal research.

Here are a few examples of practical use cases showcasing how AI legal research tools can transform day-to-day work:

- **Drafting memos and briefs:** Rather than starting from scratch, AI can synthesize your client's facts with cases, statutes, and regulations—providing organized first drafts, allowing lawyers to productively review and refine.
- **Summarizing discovery documents:** Imagine a litigation team tasked with reviewing hundreds of deposition transcripts or contracts. AI legal document review can analyze, sort, and identify key facts from legal documents. It can generate structured summaries, and link them to relevant law while still leaving final verification and legal analysis to the lawyer.
- **Analyzing trends across jurisdictions:** AI can scan case law or regulatory updates across multiple states or countries, identifying patterns in judicial decisions or regulatory interpretation to guide strategy.

These examples illustrate just a few of the ways that AI can condense hours into minutes—while increasing confidence in results, also helping lawyers focus on higher-value work like strategy, argument preparation, and client consultation.

Why law firms are turning to AI for legal research

Legal research with AI makes the process faster, more accurate, and more efficient by automating document review, surfacing relevant case law and statutes, and reducing manual citation checking.

Traditional legal research comes with several common challenges:

- **Time-consuming processes:** Lawyers can spend hours manually reviewing cases, statutes, and commentary.
- **Manual citation checking:** Ensuring citations are accurate and up-to-date manually is both tedious and error-prone.
- **Expensive database subscriptions:** Firms often rely on multiple costly platforms, leading to high overhead and limited comprehensiveness.
- **Workflow inefficiencies:** Repetitive tasks and scattered information interrupt drafting (e.g., briefs, pleadings, motions), slowing down processes to research and hindering strategic focus.

Firms are also feeling the pressure of evolving client expectations. According to the latest *Legal Trends Report*, more than half of consumers have used—or would consider using—AI to answer legal questions. If you were a client with a legal question, what would you do: pay a lawyer or use AI to quickly answer the question yourself? Which is faster? Which is

"good enough"? From the client's perspective, what's the lawyer's additive value? By adopting legal research AI, firms can respond faster, more accurately, and more strategically, keeping pace with market trends and client expectations.

How AI improves the legal research process

AI tools can transform the legal research process, but how exactly do they do it? Beyond faster search and summarization, AI reduces cognitive strain and improves accuracy by helping lawyers interpret facts, precedent, and context more efficiently.

AI legal research tools make the research process faster, more accurate, and easier to manage. They provide:

- **Faster, more accurate search and summarization:** Scanning vast volumes of documents to identify key cases, summarizing the law in a way that's customized to your client's facts.
- **Better organization of research materials:** Automatically sorting and prioritizing relevant documents.
- **Contextual search and understanding of legal issues:** Retrieving more materials using concepts, not keywords.
- **Easier collaboration and knowledge sharing**: Sharing research and arguments with colleagues, allowing teams to make knowledge actionable.
- **Reduced risk of citing outdated cases:** Flagging precedents that are outdated, criticized, superseded, or overturned.
- **Lower cognitive load during review:** AI minimizes repetitive, memory-heavy tasks so lawyers can focus on more-enjoyable tasks: legal analysis and judgment.
- **Matter-specific insights within your workflow:** In solutions like Clio Work, AI surfaces cited, on-point legal research directly inside the matter, reducing context-switching and errors.

Together, these capabilities help law firms move faster *and* more confidently—critical in an environment where clients increasingly expect both speed and precision.

For example, according to the latest *Legal Trends Report*, in timed assessments, lawyers using AI on complex case materials were twice as likely to deliver correct answers. This shows how AI can turn hours of research into minutes, while also ensuring high-quality results. Faster, cheaper, better: No need to choose two—AI can deliver all three.

How does AI improve the accuracy of legal research ?

AI improves accuracy by highlighting relevant cases, flagging “bad law,” and helping lawyers focus on the most pertinent legal authorities. These tools reduce human error, giving attorneys greater confidence in their findings.

What is legal research and analysis with AI?

Legal research and analysis with AI refers to the use of artificial intelligence to search case law, analyze statutes, summarize documents, and identify relevant legal issues faster than manual review. Tools like Clio Work combine trusted legal databases with matter-specific context, helping lawyers surface accurate, cited insights in seconds while maintaining full control over their data.

The broader business value of AI for legal research

AI for legal research doesn’t just save time and improve accuracy—it also delivers measurable business benefits:

- **Client satisfaction:** Providing timely, confident answers by surfacing relevant case law and commentary faster, enhancing client trust.
- **Competitive advantage:** Enabling lawyers to respond quickly to client needs and stay ahead in a competitive market.
- **Firm profitability:** Reducing hours spent on manual research, freeing attorneys to focus on higher-value work.

For example, imagine a lawyer at a mid-sized firm tasked with drafting a brief—requiring that lawyer to find cases, statutes, and regulations that relate to voluminous, complex, and often rare facts. With traditional methods, this could take hours, or even days.

Using AI legal research tools, the same analysis can be completed in minutes. Clio Work, for instance, analyzes fact patterns, identifies relevant precedent, highlights key obligations and facts, and surfaces supporting case law and statutes in real time, allowing the lawyer to focus on strategy with confidence that nothing critical is missed.

Tips for using AI safely and effectively in legal research

AI can accelerate legal research, but only when used responsibly. The following best practices will help law firms get faster, more accurate results while protecting client data, ensuring compliance, and maintaining trust:

- **Choose tools where you ask questions, not prompts.** The best tools don't require you to be a prompt engineer. Favor tools where you simply ask a question—or upload a file—and the AI will give you relevant research, no prompting necessary.
- **Start with clear, specific queries:** If you do want to prompt, AI outputs improve with targeted prompts that clearly define the research goal. Learning how to write effective prompts for lawyers is a good starting point.
- **Always verify AI-generated summaries and citations:** Treat AI outputs as a first draft. Confirm case law, statutes, and citations before relying on them in briefs or client work.
- **Avoid uploading confidential client data to public tools:** When handling client data, select AI tools that are secure and compliant, rather than public models, which could expose sensitive information.
- **Use AI for first-draft insights, not final legal conclusions:** AI can help surface relevant materials, summarize cases, and organize research—but it can't replace human judgment. Review is essential for legal analysis and conclusions: Your brain is your secret sauce!
- **Choose tools that meet legal privacy standards:** Look for platforms that comply with SOC 2, ISO 27001, GDPR, and other relevant data protection frameworks.
- **Integrate AI with your existing workflow:** Tools that connect directly to your document management or case management systems save time and reduce errors.
- **Train staff on prompt writing and AI best practices:** Consistent use of AI across the firm requires clear guidance, training, and internal standards to maximize effectiveness and maintain quality.

*Want to deepen your AI literacy and confidence using AI at your firm? Clio's online **Legal AI Fundamentals Certification** offers a practical, self-paced, and free way to build your knowledge and skills.*

Limitations and potential risks of AI legal research

AI can be a powerful ally in effective legal research, but it's also important to understand its limitations and use it responsibly. Here are a few risks to consider.

Hallucination and citation errors

With general-purpose AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude) for legal research, AI hallucinations, or an LLM generating false or misleading information (e.g., cases, statutes) that appears plausible, are a real risk. If AI generates case law, statutes, or legal arguments that don't exist — and a lawyer cites those falsities—that can lead to loss of client trust and serious professional and ethical consequences.

Even when AI provides real cases or statutes, it may mis-cite or link them incorrectly, creating citation errors that could mislead legal analysis if not verified.

The risk of hallucinations isn't limited to general-use LLMs. According to a study from Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), legal-specific tools generate fewer errors compared to general-purpose AI models, but they still hallucinate. In the study, between 17% and 34% of queries produced incorrect or mis-sourced citations.

While concerning, these risks can be managed. The key is consistent human oversight and careful verification of AI-generated research and citations. Read the underlying cases, statutes, and regulations. Of course, the best lawyers have *always* read the authorities—and with AI, the best lawyers continue to read the primary law.

Ethical concerns

There are also several AI legal issues and ethical considerations that lawyers must keep in mind:

- **Confidentiality**: Never upload sensitive client data to public AI models. Protect client information by using secure, compliant platforms.
- **Bias:** AI may reflect pre-existing biases present in its training data (e.g., judicial biases, "bad law" biases). If these biases are included in AI inputs and AI outputs, they can potentially affect legal analysis or recommendations.
- **Unauthorized practice of law:** AI can assist with research, but can't replace professional judgment or provide final legal advice.

Mitigation tips

These risks don't mean firms should avoid AI. Instead, they highlight the need for:

- **Human oversight:** Always verify AI outputs, summaries, and citations before relying on them. Read the underlying cases, statutes, and regulations.

- **Staff training:** Educate your team on ethical AI use, prompt writing, and verification practices.
- **Firm-wide AI policies:** Establish law firm AI policies to govern responsible AI use, data handling, and workflow standards.

Will AI replace legal researchers?

AI will not replace legal researchers; AI augments them. As a tool, AI excels at using your client's facts to scan large volumes of primary law, surfacing the relevant law, and synthesizing findings, but legal professionals are still needed to interpret results, make judgment calls, and ensure compliance with legal standards.

The future of AI-powered legal research

We're living in an exciting era for legal technology. Even with all the recent changes, AI systems continue to advance and have the potential to reshape how lawyers work, including legal research.

In the coming months and years, we can expect more integrated workflows, smarter verification systems, and more-capable drafting of larger portions of legal documents—ensuring that AI accelerates research without compromising accuracy, ethics, or client trust.

Clio Work is at the forefront of these advancements, combining AI-powered legal research with matter management, legal analysis, and secure workflows. By delivering trusted legal insights within the same platform lawyers use to manage the business of law, Clio Work makes AI both accessible and safe for firms of all sizes.

Explore Clio Work to see how AI can simplify legal research and support your firm's growth, and book a demo today!

Book a Clio demo

AI for Legal Research FAQs

Is there a free legal AI?

Yes, several free legal AI tools exist that lawyers can use for research, drafting, or summarization, although they may have limitations in features, data security, citation reliability, and currency when compared with paid platforms. Does the free AI tool have yesterday's case? Yesterday's statute? Yesterday's regulation?

Is there a legal research AI?

Yes. Legal research AI tools can be built to analyze case law, statutes, and legal documents with far more speed and accuracy than manual research. Solutions like Clio Work combine matter-aware AI with access to trusted legal databases, delivering cited analyses, relevant precedents, and jurisdiction-specific insights directly within a firm's workflow. Unlike general-purpose AI, these legal-specific tools are trained on authoritative sources and designed to meet the legal profession's demands of security and confidentiality.

Which AI is best for legal research?

The best AI tool for legal research depends on your firm's needs, including accuracy, security, and workflow integration. Clio Work is a great option that combines AI-powered research (e.g., cases, statutes, regulations) with matter management and citation tracking in a single platform, making it easier for firms to streamline their research while maintaining oversight.

How is AI transforming legal research?

AI is transforming legal research by making it dramatically faster, more accurate, and easier for lawyers to use in everyday practice. Instead of spending hours searching for relevant cases or guessing the right keywords, legal-specific AI tools can analyze vast legal databases in seconds, surface the most relevant authorities, and provide cited summaries that help lawyers get to stronger answers sooner. These tools reduce the time spent on manual research, lower cognitive load, and allow legal professionals to focus on higher-value analysis and client strategy.

As a result, firms gain efficiency, increase work capacity, and deliver more reliable, timely insights to clients—all while maintaining full control over their data.

What features do legal research AI tools offer?

Legal research AI tools offer instant case law analysis, cited legal syntheses, and natural-language search that understands legal context. They can review documents, extract key issues, compare authorities, and surface the most relevant precedents without manual keyword guesswork. The best legal-research tools can also assist brief drafting, risk or issue spotting, and integrated links to the full text of primary sources.

More advanced, legal-specific AI solutions include secure, jurisdiction-aware research, access to comprehensive legal libraries, and workflow integrations that let lawyers pull insights directly into their matters. These features help legal professionals research faster, reduce errors, and produce higher-quality work with less effort.

How AI supports legal research and analysis with AI

Modern tools don't just speed up searches—they improve the historically time-consuming process of legal research—replacing that process with AI-enabled analysis and answers. That includes interpreting fact patterns, comparing authorities, spotting issues across documents, and surfacing relevant reasoning from the primary law (e.g., cases, statutes, regulations). Instead of manually reviewing hundreds of pages, lawyers can rely on AI systems to identify laws, highlight conflicts, and organize insights by issue, jurisdiction, or matter. This creates a stronger foundation for strategy while reducing the risk of overlooking important details.

The best AI tools allow lawyers to do less drudgery, focusing instead on the higher-level tasks that are our profession's most-enjoyable aspects. Lawyers do a lot of "thinking" and "thunking" (drudgery)—AI-backed tools can do a lot of that thunking, giving lawyers more time for higher-level thinking.

Do legal-specific AI research tools still hallucinate?

Yes. According to a Stanford HAI study, legal-specific tools generate fewer errors than general-purpose models, but they still hallucinate: between 17% and 34% of queries produced incorrect or mis-sourced citations. The takeaway is consistent human oversight. Read the underlying cases, statutes, and regulations before relying on any AI output.

What are best practices for using AI in legal research?

Key practices: favor tools where you ask questions rather than engineer prompts, verify every AI summary and citation before relying on it, never upload confidential client data to public tools, use AI for first-draft insights rather than final conclusions, choose platforms meeting SOC 2 and ISO 27001 standards, integrate AI with existing workflows, and train staff on responsible use.

What are real-world examples of AI in legal research?

Three common uses: drafting memos and briefs (AI synthesizes client facts with cases, statutes, and regulations into organized first drafts), summarizing discovery documents (analyzing hundreds of transcripts or contracts and linking key facts to relevant law), and analyzing trends across jurisdictions (scanning case law and regulatory updates to identify patterns that guide strategy).

What challenges in traditional legal research does AI solve?

Four challenges: time-consuming manual review of cases, statutes, and commentary; tedious and error-prone manual citation checking; expensive subscriptions across multiple databases; and workflow inefficiencies where repetitive tasks and scattered information interrupt drafting. AI addresses each by surfacing relevant authority faster, flagging bad law, and reducing manual review.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.