Writing Case Summaries

*A case summary is a short, written summary of a legal case which someone can read to save them researching the details of the entire case. It is presented in a clear, simple format. It is supposed to outline the essentials. The format below is the one you will use in this course:*

Case Identification:

The case identification includes the names of both parties, the place (court) where the case was heard, and the year. In civil cases, there will be the names of the two people or groups involved:

Dahlber c. Microsoft, Ontario, 1997

 In a criminal case, the first “name” will be an “R.,” which signifies “Regina,” meaning “the queen” in Latin:

R. v. Bobbsey, Supreme Court of Canada, July 6, 1998.

Statement of the Facts:

This needs to be a half-page or less in length, and should outline the basics of the crime or suit, and what the court was to decide upon. All accused persons will be referred to as “accused” (rather than as thieves, murderers, felons or whatever) unless referring to a past crime of which they were found guilty. It is vital to word everything that “remains to be seen” at the beginning of the court case in terms which are appropriate to that. No assumptions. In criminal cases, the section of the criminal code which may have been violated should be mentioned.

Legal Questions:

This section highlights the ethical decision involved in potentially using this case as precedent for future trials. It will use the word “should” for the judge to decide:

Should the police be allowed to search lockers at gyms?

Should using an imitation firearm in a robbery result in the robber not being convicted of armed robbery?

Judgment:

State what the court decided. This should be no more than a sentence or two long. Putting the word “Held:” is a convention:

 *Held*: An imitation firearm serves the same purpose (intimidation and fear of death) as a real one.

Significance:

Explain, starting with “This case shows…” what the importance of this case would be, were it to be used as an example or precedent.

 This case shows that simply asking to speak with an attorney at time of arrest is not usable as evidence of guilt in a court of law.