Finding a Regulation by Subject:

You will often have to begin your research for federal regulations based on nothing more than a specific topic. When that is the case, you have several options:

- You can do a full-text search on FDSys, Lexis, Westlaw, or Bloomberg Law;
- You can use the print C.F.R. index; or
- You can use the C.F.R. index on Westlaw

At this time, Lexis and Bloomberg do not have a C.F.R. index.

Since you are probably already familiar with searching commercial databases, let’s look at full-text searching on the Government Printing Office web site, called FDSys.

There are two C.F.R. databases on the FDSys web site: one that contains official PDF images from the print C.F.R. (and is therefore no more current than the print version) and another containing an HTML version of the regulations. This HTML version is unofficial but usually current within two business days. Because it is more up to date, it is usually better to use the unofficial database, which is called the e-CFR.

Next, we’ll demonstrate how to conduct a subject search on the e-CFR.

On the e-CFR home page, we can start by conducting a simple search by selecting “Simple Search” in the menu on the left. It’s best to limit your search to one title of the CFR by typing the title number in the “Enter a Title Number” box. You could also browse the menu on the previous screen to find the most relevant title. We’ll enter Title Number 16 and we can search for imitation numismatic and click Submit Search. (Numismatic means “relating to coins”). This search retrieves several CFR sections, all in 16 CFR Part 304. Note that if we had searched for imitation coins, instead of imitation numismatic, we would have found nothing. This demonstrates how difficult it can be to find regulations using full-text searches. Regulations, like statutes, use very precise and often unobvious terms. For this reason, it is sometimes better to use an index.

There are four commonly available indexes to the Code of Federal Regulations.

- In the print CFR is an Index and Finding Aids volume.
- The United State Code Service has a special volume in print.
- West publishes a print index.
- One is available in the CFR database on Westlaw.

The indexes do differ slightly. Therefore, in this tutorial we will look at the official CFR index and the CFR index on Westlaw.

Let’s look at the official CFR index first:

The separate CFR print volume labeled Index and Finding Aids is not a very detailed index. However, its cross-indexing can prove useful. For example, if we look under the term Coins, this index provides a cross reference to the potentially useful term Currency.

Westlaw provides a far more detailed index to the CFR through its CFR database. A print version of this index is also available in many libraries. Let’s try using Westlaw’s online index.

From the WestlawNext introductory screen, start by selecting the Federal Materials tab. Next select the Code of Federal Regulations link. Under “Tools and Resources” on the CFR search screen is the link to the CFR Index. If we browse for “Coins” in Westlaw’s CFR index, we get a cross-reference to “Money” which we’ll click now.
Under the “Money” heading, you’ll have to scroll down to locate a subheading on point. A subheading for “Imitation Numismatic Items” leads us to 16 CFR Part 304.