**How to Prepare a Case Brief**

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A case brief summarizes a court decision by outlining, at a minimum, the facts of the case, the legal issues raised, and the rationale for the court’s decision. The case brief follows a rather simple outline. The manner in which the brief is to be formatted can be viewed in the attached “sample case brief.” Utilize this example when completing your assigned briefs. The different headings that must be included are:

**Facts**
Summarize the facts of the case. List only the essential facts that you need to understand the holding and reasoning of the case.

**Legal Question**
Phrase, in your own words, the legal question the court has tried to answer in this case. State the issue as a question, for example “Can a police officer...?.” Sometimes the issue is pointed out very clear in the opinion of the case, for example, “This case presents the question...,” but at other times it is not quite so obvious. Even when the issue is obviously presented in the opinion, you should still phrase it in your own words.

**Decision**
How has this court resolved the issue? What was the outcome? What action did the court take? Like the legal issue, the court’s decision is probably clearly stated in the opinion. This is basically the answer to the legal question. It may at times consist of a sentence or short paragraph.

**Court’s Rationale**
Why did the court reach the decision it did? What arguments justify the holding? Because judges often write many pages when justifying and explaining their decisions, this can be a difficult section for student’s to write. You will need to read the reasoning and summarize it into a short paragraph.

**Dissenting Opinion**
In a majority of cases there will be a dissenting opinion. This is where the justice’s that are in the minority are allowed to voice their reasons for disagreeing with the majority. This section does not need to be lengthy, as justices often use this area to ramble on excessively about legal methods and opinions not needed for a brief.

**Significance of the Case**
Discuss what importance the ruling has on the law and society as a whole.
In order to research your briefs, you may utilize any number of websites. The four most common websites include: www.findlaw.com, www.oyez.org, law.cornell.edu, and supreme.justia.com.

The attached sample brief will guide you in determining what type of information is required for each heading.

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