

# technology essentials:

Here are my top picks for the everyday law librarian or, come to think of it, any librarian.

**S**ome days, it seems like a hat trick. Librarians are expected to juggle a number of different job responsibilities at once and must wear many hats. Envision this: There's the top hat for the presenter in you—preparing for a presentation can seem very daunting when you want to make a good impression on your audience. There's the fedora for the cool professor—controlling the tempo of your classroom to spark the students' interests. There's the beret for the sophisticated artist—making creative signage for library events is challenging, if the thought of Photoshop makes you cringe.

For these reasons, it is essential to have a list of easy-to-use tools at your fingertips to get you through the workday—tools that do not require one-on-one training from the IT department. The following programs are my top picks for the everyday law librarian—or, come to think of it, any librarian. What makes them unique is that they are free and web-based, meaning there are no installations required (which sometimes poses issues for institutions with restrictions on unapproved software downloads). Now, you can take full advantage of these tools and combine all of your hats into one giant sombrero of productivity and efficiency by using technology to tackle your daily tasks. ▶

# top 1

**FREE**

computer tools

**FOR**  
law librarians

by  
avery le

## CUT, CROP, AND CONVERT: MEDIA FILES

Have you ever had complications editing and adjusting media files to your liking? Oftentimes, librarians receive media files such as tutorial videos from vendors. However, sometimes they won't play on the preloaded programs on our work computer, or they won't integrate with an outdated version of a program—because the file extension can only be used with the latest released version. The incompatibility of systems and files can present a hurdle if you don't know how to conduct simple file conversions. There is the option of asking a colleague to help you with this, but relying on someone else to do a simple task for you could delay your schedule, especially if there is a pressing deadline. Another trick you may need to know is how to trim a media file into the exact length you want in order to insert it into a presentation or class lecture. The following websites will help you with these tasks.

### 1 Clip Converter

This will convert your media file—both audio and video—into any of the following formats: MP3, M4A, and AAC (for audio) as well as MP4, 3GP, AVI, and MOV (for video). Simply input the media URL and click Continue, then select the file type you want to convert to under Conversion Format. Click the Start button below and you are on your way to a new file conversion in a matter of seconds. Once the conversion is completed, you will receive a notification to download the newly converted file to your computer. (Caution: Uncheck the “download with accelerator and get recommendations and offers” box before clicking the black Download button above it.) The website is completely free because it runs primarily on advertisement sales. So be careful not to click on any pop-up ads or make any installations from the website prompts—or else you might wind up with stuff on your computer you didn't really want.

**Bonus:** With Clip Converter, there is another equally beneficial feature. It enables you to download streaming files and save them to your computer. That way, you can reuse them in your presentations. Sometimes, streaming files are not ideal if you are faced with unreliable or unavailable internet connections. I have experienced technical difficulties during conference presentations in which the hotel Wi-Fi is too slow and causes a YouTube clip to keep buffering and freezing up, or the internet connection was down that day. Unfortunately, this can agitate the audience, as they wait for you to remedy the situation. Fussing with the technology will cut into your valuable presentation time.

Clip Converter helps you avoid this potential problem by letting you download the YouTube clip to your computer ahead of time. This way, you can take the file with you and play it without the assistance of a web browser or an internet connection. Clip Converter allows you to strip videos from YouTube, Google Videos, Myspace, Dailymotion, Vimeo, and other streaming services into a downloadable video file. Although you should be mindful of copyright policies when doing this, a temporary download to your computer for a quick presentation will not violate copyright laws, especially if the video file is hosted on a channel that belongs to your institution or on a public one that allows sharing of files for educational purposes under fair use.<sup>1</sup> Another great use

of Clip Converter is to back up those video files hosted online, so that you can retain copies of them, should the site server crash.

**Website:** clipconverter.cc

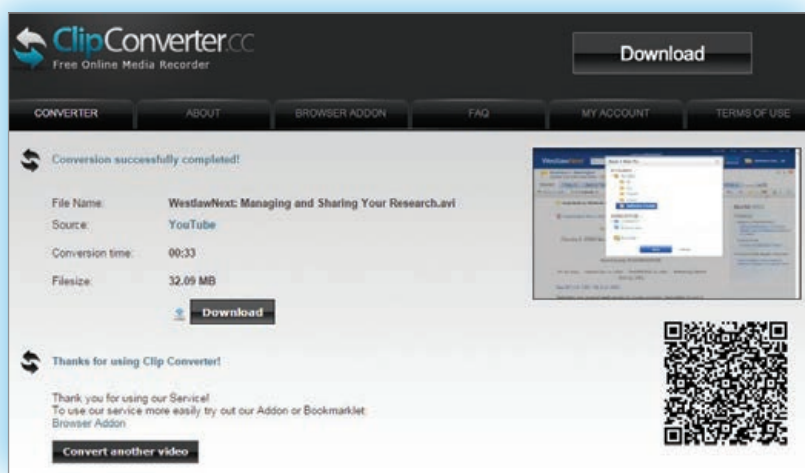
**Price:** Free with no restrictions

**Compatibility:** Web browser and JavaScript; Firefox, Chrome, Safari, or Internet Explorer 8

### Online Video Cutter

A common request I've received from colleagues is to shorten a video file to only include the parts that they need. You may also have to do this if the file size is too large and there is insufficient storage space for it, or if it takes too long to load because your computer lacks memory. Moreover, according to a study conducted in 2008,<sup>2</sup> the average length of a single internet video is 2.7 minutes, due to the short attention span of people today. Anything longer will cause one's mind to wander off. Therefore, shorter video clips are preferable, especially if they effectively capture the most important points in that limited time frame.

Online Video Cutter is an easy three-step website that allows you to pick and choose the starting and stopping point of your video, and then trim it down to only include that length of time. Step one: open file. Step two: cut file. Step three: save file. It really is as simple as 1-2-3. The only drawback is that it has a



maximum file size limit of 500MB. However, with the types of videos that law librarians deal with, 500MB is a very generous size, considering that a typical size for a 10-minute video is about 20–30MB.

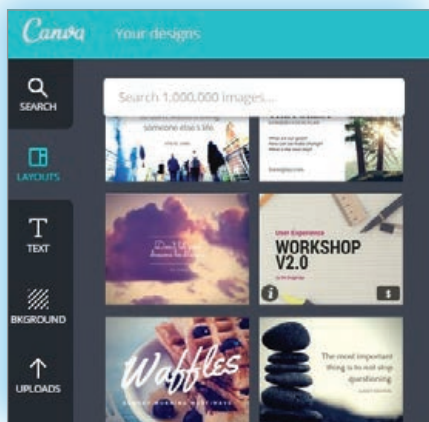
**Website:** [online-video-cutter.com](http://online-video-cutter.com)  
**Price:** Free (max file size is 500MB)  
**Compatibility:** Most web browsers

## PICTURE THIS: IMAGES AND GRAPHICS

One of the essential skills we need as librarians is how to find an appropriate image or graphic to liven up content. Whether you're making a No Food Allowed or special events sign, adding images to your digital display, jazzing up your lecture slides, or updating your social media pages, an attractive image will go a long way in terms of making a significant impact. The following three tools will make it easier for you to design, edit, and input any image to fit your requirements—and you don't need a degree in graphic design to navigate their features.

### Canva

What do you do when you want to make a poster that appeals to others, but you have little to no artistic skills? Not to worry—Canva can assist you. You can use the search box to look up any image you desire. The program contains a commendable collection of free graphics, but there is also a pay-per-image option for



\$1, if you find one using its image search engine that you just can't live without. The \$1 will cover any licensing fees to the owner of the image for widespread use. Of course, you can also upload your own images for free.

You can edit the built-in templates by adding or subtracting emphatic lines and shapes, text, icons, and pictures. After you are finished with your masterpiece, you can download your beautiful designs as a PDF or IMG file (you will have to extract the images from a zip file if there is more than one slide). The preselected design categories for use in PowerPoint, Facebook, Instagram, and more will provide you with the exact dimensions needed for the corresponding platforms, so that you can easily upload or insert them without making additional adjustments (such as resizing or cropping the images). Alternatively, print them out and use them as signage or include them in fliers or brochures for promotional and marketing purposes. You can also create infographics.

**Website:** [canva.com](http://canva.com)  
**Price:** Free; \$1 per premium images (pay as you go)  
**Compatibility:** Browser-based; iPad app also available

### Easel.ly

Speaking of infographics, this is another free and easy-to-use program. With simple graphic categories (such as maps, ecommerce, technology, and icons), it is easy to drag and drop things into your canvas area and edit the infographic to your liking. There are plenty of free symbols and fonts to choose from, but if you want even more options, you can go Pro for an annual subscription of \$36 to access even more images and themed templates. Download your work as an image or PDF, whenever you're ready; you can also send it to the printer or share a link to your finished product for online accessibility.

**Website:** [easel.ly](http://easel.ly)  
**Price:** Free; go Pro for \$36 a year for additional template designs  
**Compatibility:** Most web browsers

### PicMonkey

I have a confession to make—I have used this program to edit many images for my digital photography business (shhh ... don't tell my clients). Although there are many expensive programs suitable for photo-editing processes, PicMonkey is a quick and cheap alternative that won't compromise the integrity of the original image quality, even after multiple edits. The free features offer a variety of ways to satisfy your simple image-editing needs, such as applying filters, tints, cropping, resizing, additions, text, smoothening, and light exposures. Think of it as falling somewhere between Microsoft's Paint and Adobe's Photoshop, but designed with beginners in mind. If you're looking for an easy fix to a bland photo, this is the right program for you. Just register for a free account to get started.

**Bonus:** You can create photo collages and add in textured backgrounds as well as frames for special occasions. The program adds seasonal features throughout the year that will enable you to take your images to a festive level.

**Website:** [picmonkey.com](http://picmonkey.com)  
**Price:** Free; about \$5 per month or \$33 a year for a premium account to unlock additional features  
**Compatibility:** Most web browsers

## TEACH ME HOW: INSTRUCTION TOOLS FOR THE CLASSROOM

One of our primary responsibilities as law librarians is to educate students. Most librarians teach one or more classes on legal research or advanced legal research, and we yearn to deliver the material to our students in an effective manner—one that will keep the students' attention and reignite their excitement to learn. The following tools serve practical, as well as creatively engaging, purposes to ensure that your students react positively to the implementation of these tools into your lectures and assignments.

## Screencast-O-Matic

Screencasts have become an increasingly important teaching tool for law librarians. Students rely on them as walk-throughs for some of the more complex online research skills used via legal databases (such as Westlaw, LexisNexis, and Bloomberg). Although students often receive live demonstrations from the vendor representatives, there are times when they need to review some of the core navigational steps, and screencasts are a good way to encapsulate the live demonstrations and slow the process down to a more manageable speed.

Screencast-O-Matic offers “one-click screen captures” for on-screen recordings of both computer screen and webcam activity. Not only can you record your mouse and click movements, but you can also attach a video of yourself describing the actions as you go. There are few screencast programs that have both these functions, and that is where Screencast-O-Matic excels. Aside from offering the downloadable version, there is also a browser-based JavaScript version with no installation required. However, keep in mind that this means you will need an uninterrupted and reliable internet connection while recording online (but most law librarians will need the internet to connect to the password-protected legal databases anyway).

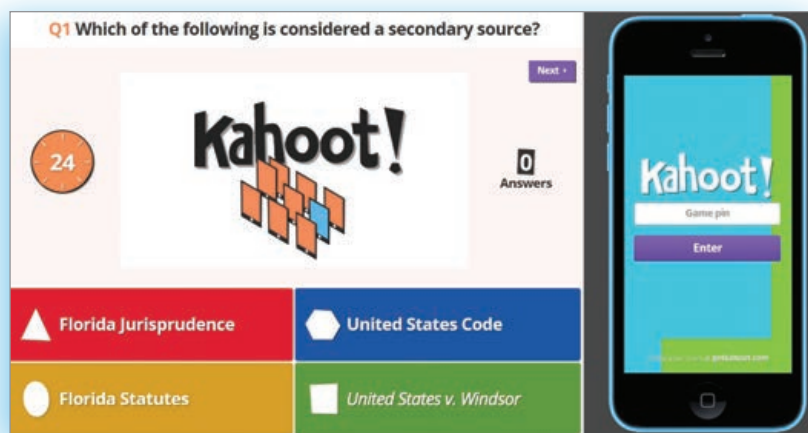
**Website:** [screencast-o-matic.com](http://screencast-o-matic.com)

**Price:** Free for 15-minute video max; \$15 per year for unlimited, plus editing features

**Compatibility:** Windows or Mac; web browsers with JavaScript

## Kahoot!

Who isn't a fan of playing games? No matter what age your students are, it is possible to incorporate something fun, competitive, and challenging into their syllabus. It might surprise you how much information your students can absorb when they have a stake in what is happening on the screen in front of them. Kahoot! is a quick and innovative way to engage your students in



an online quiz-type game. This instant student response system will allow your students to sign in using their mobile device or laptop, then answer multiple choice questions in real time with all of their classmates. You can use this as an icebreaker start to your class or save it for a review session for the end of the semester. Either way, it requires very little effort—just creating an account, plugging in the questions and answers, and giving the URL and pin number that your students need to join the game.

**Website:** [getkahoot.com](http://getkahoot.com)

**Price:** Free

**Compatibility:** PC or Mac with web browser; iPad, iPhone, and Android smartphones or tablets

## Zaption

This enables you to add captions, quiz questions, and voiceovers to streaming videos. When you assign videos to students, you can now double-check that they are paying attention to the videos and truly learning from them by inserting pop-up questions that students have to answer correctly to continue the video. You can add highlights and arrows to emphasize the important details as well as create voiceovers to narrate the parts that require supplemental explanations. Zaption adds new improvements to pre-existing videos online to invite more class interaction and participation with the lessons.

**Website:** [zaption.com](http://zaption.com)

**Price:** Free; \$89 a year for the Pro Classroom edition

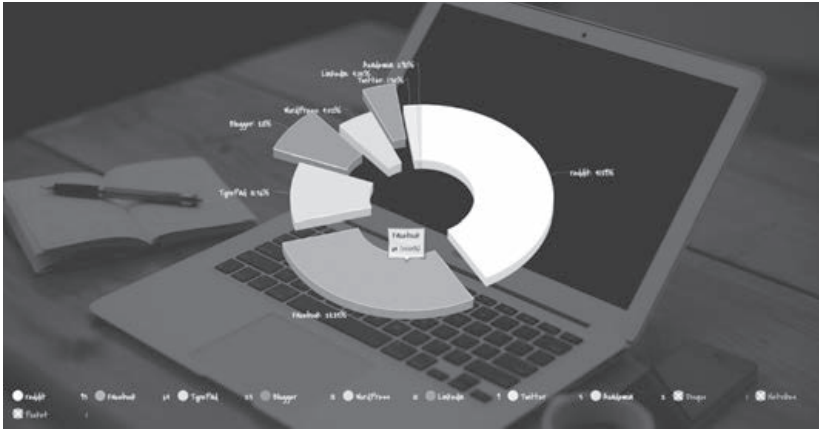
**Compatibility:** Windows or Mac with web browser; viewable on Apple App Player for iOS 7 or later

## SHOWTIME: PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Publications and presentations are vital to most librarians, but for tenure-track librarians like me, there is an even higher threshold to meet. With the added pressures of public speaking and eloquent writing skills thrown into the mix, tools that alleviate some of those pressures in creating visualizations and conducting the research are welcome. Here are a few tools that can make your presentations pop and your research process more proficient, so that you can spend more time perfecting your content.

## amCharts

The ability to create a stunning and informative chart or graph is one of the things law librarians push to the bottom of their priorities list. However, adding data visualizations to a presentation or article goes a long way to explaining and interpreting our research results concisely. amCharts can help you bring your statistics to life, so you can present



amCharts

your findings interactively online or print them in a publication offline.

All you need to do is sign up for a free account, then select the type of chart you want to create. Fill in the columns with your data and information, select from a variety of modernized color schemes, and you're good to go. The feature that I like the most is the ability to display or hide certain datapoints by checking or unchecking the boxes next to their names. This gives you the flexibility to highlight the important parts you want to discuss or to show the impact of excluding part of the equation. amCharts also allows you to download charts as images, so you can easily insert them into your articles or embed live charts into your LibGuides, blogs, or websites.

**Bonus:** Try amMaps, which is a related program for creating appealing national or global maps that feature interactive data, if you have knowledge about HTML5 web design.

**Website:** amcharts.com

**Price:** Free online live editor; one-time fee of \$140 for single-use license to incorporate it into your own website

**Compatibility:** Most web browsers with JavaScript

## 10 iCyte

I have used this tool for conducting research online and have recommended it to our faculty members. When researching online, it is tedious to bookmark every

webpage you need as a source or to save a chunk of quotes or texts to incorporate them into your own work later. With the back-and-forth routine of copying and pasting—coupled with remembering to write down the title of the work, author, and URL—publication information can become insurmountable. iCyte allows you to save time by placing an iCyte button in your browser's toolbar that will do the work for you. Just highlight the parts of a webpage or article you want to save, then click the 'iCyte' button. It will not only automatically transfer the highlighted text, but also extract the meta-data information about the article details and the webpage itself. Then, it will categorize the information in list form under the folder name you've created.

In just two mouse clicks, you will have the bibliographic information, as well as the quoted text, at your disposal whenever you are ready to compile the sources for your research. Plus, you can revisit the link at any time. This is a perfect organizational tool that will cut your research time down significantly. In turn, it will also prepare you for an easy transition into creating your footnotes, as well as a bibliographic or references page for your article at the end of your research and writing process.


**Website:** icyte.com

**Price:** Free iCyte Education account for students and faculty members (via an .edu email address)

**Compatibility:** Safari, Internet Explorer, Chrome, and Firefox

WHAT ARE YOU  
WAITING FOR?  
Go test these great  
tools out for yourself!

### TRYING THEM ON FOR SIZE

There you have it—the top 10 free computer tools to get you through your busy work week without requiring the assistance of the IT department. Remember, all of these programs are free to use and do not require any download installation to operate (although, a few do come with that option). This means you will not have to take up valuable disk space or memory to run the program on your computer. With simple and easy-to-follow setup instructions, you can befriend technology and use it to facilitate your tasks, rather than letting it frustrate you. After all, these advances in technology are developed to help you succeed in your professional roles. What are you waiting for? Go test these great tools out for yourself! 

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### ENDNOTES

- 17 United States Code, Sec. 107. 2012. Print.
- Weinreich, Harald, Hartmut Obendorf, Eelco Herder, and Matthias Mayer. "Not Quite the Average: An Empirical Study of Web Use." *ACM Transactions on the Web*. 2.1 (2008): 1–31. Print.

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