

Legal Periodicals

Legal periodicals include law journals, law reviews, bar journals, commercial journals, and newspapers. For researchers, the most valuable aspect of these secondary sources is the citations to primary source material found in their footnotes. Some of these periodicals may contain scholarly and academically oriented articles and others may be explanatory articles or contain “how to” content for a specific audience of practitioners.

Law reviews are not what you probably think. They are not a “review” of the law. Encyclopedias, treatises, and hornbooks are the sources to consult for an explanation of the law. A law review is an opinion piece, a personal or philosophical point of view of the law or an issue of law. In an article in an explanatory source, an editor states what the law is. In a law review article, the author(s) reacts to the law.

Reading a law review article is an important first step in your research because the law review article contains numerous and usually exhaustive citations and footnotes on your topic. Sometimes the footnotes are more valuable to you as research tools than the text. The law review article highlights the debate on a topic. The author gives his/her point of view and lays out his/her argument.

Law review articles may be written by law students or noted authors. Seldom will you cite to a law review article unless there is no primary source on your issue. You may cite to a law review article if the author is a highly influential and respected writer on a particular point of law.

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When reading articles from legal periodicals, please keep the following in mind:

- ❑ *Coverage*: Is your topic detailed or is it broad and general?
- ❑ *Accuracy*: Are the arguments supported by cited authority?
- ❑ *Persuasiveness*: How well written is this article? Is it clear, convincing, and logical?
- ❑ *Reputation (author)*: Is the author reputable in that area of the law? Look at the author's biography and credentials. Look for other articles or books written by the author.
- ❑ *Reputation (periodical)*: Is this a well known periodical in this particular area of the law? Who are the other editors and authors writing for it?

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