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**Secondary sources of law**

Secondary sources are materials that discuss, explain, analyze and critique the law. They discuss the law but are not the law itself. Great places to start one’s legal research are through secondary sources such as Journals, Encyclopedias and Treaties. Unlike the primary sources/materials such as case laws, statutes and regulations, secondary materials helps to learn about an area of law and provides with citations to relevant primary materials.

A good placed to start most research projects is with a secondary source. A secondary source is not the law. It’s a commentary on the law. A secondary source can be used for three different purposes: it could educate you about the law, it might direct you to the primary law, or it might serve as persuasive authority. Only few sources happen to do all three jobs well. The important classes of legal secondary sources include treaties, periodical articles, legal encyclopedias, ALR annotations, restatements and loose leaf services.

Legal researchers are encouraged to begin with the secondary sources such as law review articles or treaties, which are likely to lead to specific primary law such as statutory references or case citations. Secondary sources are a great place to begin your research. Although the primary sources of law-case law, statutes and regulations- establish the law on a given topic, it is often difficult to locate answers in them. Secondary sources often explain legal principles more thoroughly than a single case or statute, so using them can help you save time. Secondary sources also help you avoid unnecessary research, since you are tapping into work that someone else has already done on an issue. Secondary materials are particularly useful for:

* Learning the basics of a particular area of law.
* Understanding key terms of art in an area.
* Identifying essential cases and statutes.

The Law Library is a place with a wide variety of secondary sources that describe critique and analyze the law. Various secondary sources we can find in the law library are as follows:

**Legal Encyclopedias.**

Legal encyclopedias contain brief, broad summaries of legal topics, providing introductions to legal topics and explaining relevant terms of art. They also provide citations to relevant primary law and sometimes give citations to relevant major law review articles.

A legal encyclopedia is a comprehensive set of brief articles on legal topics.  It is arranged in alphabetical order, with an index generally included in the final volume.  Legal encyclopedias are a great place to start your research on a new topic since they offer a general introduction to a legal topic, and often include citations to cases and additional materials.

The two main legal encyclopedias are:

* Corpus Juris Secondum (C.J.S.)
* American Jurisprudence 2nd (Am. Jur.2d)

**American Law Reports.**

American Law Reports (frequently abbreviated and referred to as ALR) contains in-depth articles on narrow topics of the law. ALR articles, called annotations, provide background, analysis, and citations to relevant cases, statutes, law review articles, and other annotations.

ALR provides topical annotations that focus on relatively narrow areas of the law, but discuss it in some depth. They provide a good basic grounding in law, as well as serve as good case finding tools. ALR is available in print and on Lexis (link is external) and Westlaw. Annotations can be identified in print by using the ALR Index to Annotations and online via online searches. Please note that the ALR titles tend to be very descriptive. So it can be useful to limit your search to the title field. In addition, the second section of an ALR annotation generally covers related annotations.

**Treatises**

Treatises--books on legal topics--are a good place to begin your research or find an answer to a question, and will help you save time by providing explanation, analysis, and tips on the most relevant primary sources. Treatises range from single volume overviews to extensively detailed multi-volume sets. They may come in the form of bound books updated with pocket parts or loose-leaf with easily replaced pages. Some treatises are intended for law students while others are meant for practicing lawyers. Legal treatises provide a scholarly and in-depth treatment of a legal subject. They often clarify significant concepts in the area of the law covered by the treatise and provide citations to pertinent cases and other primary materials.  The Law Library maintains treatises covering a wide variety of subjects, in both print and electronic formats

**Law Journals.**

Law review or journal articles are another great secondary source for legal research, valuable for the depth in which they analyze and critique legal topics, as well as their extensive references to other sources, including primary sources. Law Journals are scholarly publications covering the legal field.  They publish articles that are comprehensive studies of current topics in law, generally written by law professors and practitioners.  The articles generally contain substantial citations to primary and secondary sources on the topic, which may lead you to additional information on the subject. Some law reviews are dedicated to a particular topic, such as gender and the law or environmental law, and will include in their contents the proceedings of a wide range of panels and symposia on timely legal issues. Law reviews are scholarly publications, usually edited by law students in conjunction with faculty members. They contain both lengthy articles and shorter essays by professors and lawyers, as well as comments, notes, or developments in the law written by students. Law review articles often focus on new or emerging areas of law and they can offer more critical commentary than a legal encyclopedia or ALR entry. Some forms of journals are:

* Paper Versions: In NYU Law Library, all law reviews, journals and other periodicals ("journals") are shelved by call number, not alphabetically.
* Electronic Journals
* Indexes: Indexes give access to multidisciplinary sources. Indexes, such as Hein Online Law Journal Library and Index to Legal Periodicals Full text provide access to hundreds of journals.

**Restatements.**

Restatements are highly regarded distillations of common law. They are prepared by the American Law Institute (ALI), a prestigious organization comprising judges, professors, and lawyers. The ALI's aim is to distill the "black letter law" from cases to indicate trends in common law, and occasionally to recommend what a rule of law should be. In essence, they restate existing common law into a series of principles or rules. They were developed by legal scholars initially to restate the law, and currently to describe what the law should be. In either case, Restatements are very persuasive although they are not very good at describing the law. They can serve as adequate law finders. There are restatements for many areas of law: but not all. The Restatements are available on Lexis (link is external) and Westlaw(link is external) and in print. Online, they can be searched in full-text; in print you would use the library catalog to identify the relevant restatement and then the restatement’s own index to find the relevant sections. Restatements cover broad topics, such as Contracts or Property. They are organized into chapters, titles, and sections. Sections contain a concisely stated rule of law, comments to clarify the rule, hypothetical examples, explanation of purpose, as well as exceptions to the rule. Restatements are not primary law. Due to the prestige of the ALI and its painstaking drafting process, however, they are considered persuasive authority by many courts. The most heavily cited Restatements are the Restatement of Torts and the Restatement of Contracts.

**Loose-leaf Services.**

Loose leaf services bring together all of the law on a particular topic. Loose-leaf services don't exist for all areas of law, but when they do exist, they can be an invaluable resource. They are rarely cited except when they serve as a case reporter. However, for a researcher, they bring together in one place the code, administrative regulations, court decisions, administrative decisions, citations, finding aids, commentaries, forms, etc. Loose-leaf services are moving online.