



How-To Guide: How to Find Legal Journal Articles

This guide outlines the steps to take when you need to find legal journal articles.

There are two ways to search for articles on a legal topic:

Method A: [Use a Legal Periodical Index](#)

- Step 1: [Determine Whether Your Topic Is Likely to Be Addressed in Journal Articles](#)
- Step 2: [Select the Most Appropriate Index and Begin Your Search](#)
- Step 3: [Locate the Text of Cited Articles](#)

Method B: [Conduct a Search in a Database of Full-Text Journal Articles](#)

- Step 1: [Determine Whether Your Topic Is Suitable for Retrieval in Full-Text Databases](#)
- Step 2: [Select the Most Suitable Database and Begin Your Search](#)

Additional Resources

[Last Tip](#)

Method A: Use a Legal Periodical Index

Step 1: Determine Whether Your Topic Is Likely to Be Addressed in Journal Articles

- Journal articles are useful to:
 - Explain and analyze current topics
 - Provide case commentaries
 - Direct you to relevant primary law (cases and legislation)
 - Alert you to key terms (useful for subsequent online searching)
- Journal articles help you when your topic is:
 - Current or
 - Fairly specific or
 - Too new or too narrow to be the subject of a book
- Does your topic fit within any of the criteria mentioned above? If not consider using a textbook on the subject.

Step 2: Select the Most Appropriate Index and Begin Your Search

- Print and online indexes can be searched by subject/keyword, author or title and often can be restricted by date. These tools provide you with a list of articles with citation information, but not usually the full text of the article. For tips on how to obtain the article itself, see [Step 3](#). The most

commonly used indexes are listed below.

- *Index to Canadian Legal Literature* online versions of this index cover materials published after 1985. The print version must be used to find earlier articles. A version of the *Index* is available on both Westlaw Canada and LexisNexis Quicklaw.
 - Westlaw Canada the *Index* is available from the home page of LawSource. In a limited number of cases, Westlaw Canada cites are linked to the full-text of the article.
 - LexisNexis Quicklaw
 - Select the **Source Directory** tab.
 - Select the **Browse Sources** tab.
 - Select **Legal Indices & Tables**.
 - Select **Index to Canadian Legal Literature – Journals and Texts**.
 - Select **OK – Continue**.

If you know the name of the author you are looking for, click on **Show document segments** and select **Author** from the dropdown menu beside the word **Segment**. If the article is found in one of the journals that are available full-text on LexisNexis Quicklaw, there will be a link to the full text.
- LegalTrac primarily American but includes leading Canadian, British and other English-language material. Coverage begins with 1980. This index includes some full-text resources and some abstracts.

Step 3: Locate the Text of Cited Articles

- If you don't know what the journal abbreviation in the citation stands for, consult the [Cardiff Index to Legal Abbreviations](#) or ask [Great Library staff](#).
- Next, check to see if the Great Library or your local county law library carries the journal by checking the [Journal Locator](#) on the Great Library website.
- Commercial online services such as LexisNexis Quicklaw, Westlaw Canada or HeinOnline carry electronic versions of journal articles. Check the online directories of these services for availability of the journal. Free access to these services is provided on Great Library workstations and in some county and district law Libraries.
- A small number of journals are also available full-text on the open Web. Check the listing [Legal Periodicals Online](#).
- Check the collection of a local [university law library](#).
- If you are unable to find the journal article, contact the [Great Library](#) or ask your county or firm librarian for help.

Method B: Conduct a Search in a Database of Full-Text Journal Articles

Step 1: Determine Whether Your Topic Is Suitable for Retrieval in Full-Text Databases

- Several online sources allow you to search the full-text of available journals using keywords. The number of Canadian journal titles included in online databases is still relatively small. Keep in mind that broader coverage is available through journal indexes.
- Full-text searching tends to retrieve a large number of irrelevant articles (where your terms appear somewhere in the text but are not the subject of the article). This type of searching is best used for unique keywords or names.

Step 2: Select the Most Suitable Database and Begin Your Search

- Commonly used full-text sources are listed below.
 - Westlaw Canada select the option **Law Reports, Articles and Journals** from the home page of LawSource. This resource includes Canadian articles and annotations from law reports as well as journals and newsletters. Coverage varies depending on the publication.
 - LexisNexis Quicklaw
 - Select the **Search** tab.
 - Select the **Journals** tab. This database contains about 30 individual Canadian titles. Coverage varies depending on the publication but most holdings date back to the 1990s.
 - *Or,*
 - Select the **Search** tab.
 - Select the **Commentary** tab. This larger database includes journals, newsletters and text commentary.
 - HeinOnline select the option **Law Journal Library** from the home page. This database contains mainly U.S. journals but also includes some content from Canada and other jurisdictions. Coverage usually reaches back to the first issue of the journal, but may not include the most recent years.

Last Tip

Finally, it is always a good strategy to browse recent issues of relevant journals or newsletters for articles on point. There is a time lag between the publication of an issue of a journal and its inclusion in an index. Furthermore, not all journals and newsletters are covered by the indexes or included in online sources.

Last reviewed: October 21, 2008