



American Law Reports

Research Guide

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Scope:

This guide is to assist patrons in using the *American Law Reports (ALR)*, which is located in the third floor stacks at the Main branch. There are also copies at the East County and North County branches.

What the ALR is:

The *ALR* is a reporter containing detailed analysis of significant legal topics under state and federal law. The *ALR* 1st through 6th volumes contain discussions of state and federal legal issues. The *ALR Federal*, begun in 1969, contains discussions solely of federal issues.

The value of the *ALR* lies in its comprehensive and in-depth analysis of specific issues. The annotations discuss which cases are controlling and why, provide a useful guide to the state and federal cases and statutes that apply in each area, and provide references to other potential research sources. **Keep in mind** that some topics are discussed in different annotations in both the *ALR* and the *ALR Federal*. To get a full picture of both state and federal law on a subject, you should read both.

A drawback of the *ALR* is its confusing indexing and digesting system. Some series have their own indexes and digests, others share, and some are overlapping. In addition, many *ALR* annotations have been updated from one series to the next, so it is important to use a research method that ensures that you are reading the most recent annotation.

To find the discussion of a federal legal issue:

- If you know that your topic is governed by federal law, go directly to the *ALR Federal* (KF 132.A47).
- If you are looking for a discussion of a specific federal case, statute or regulation, look at *ALR Federal Tables* (at KF 132.A47, at the end of *ALR Federal*). These volumes contain all of the cases, statutes and regulations included in the *ALR Federal* annotations, directing you to the most recent annotation about each.



- Alternatively, if you do not have a specific case, statute or regulation to research, look in the *Quick Index* at the end of the *ALR Federal* (at KF132.A47) and try to find the topic there.
- If you cannot find what you are seeking in the *ALR Federal's Quick Index*, take a look at the combined *ALR Index* for *ALR 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th* and *ALR Federal* (at KF 132.6.A544, at the end of *ALR 6th*). It is possible that the subject is discussed in the regular *ALR*, instead of *ALR Federal*.
- Finally, if you have been unable to find your topic in either the *Quick Index* or the combined *ALR Index*, look in the *ALR Federal Digest* (at the end of the *ALR Federal*, at KF 132.A47). Like a state digest or the *Federal Practice Digest*, the *ALR Federal Digest* breaks down areas of law into small, discrete topics. For each topic, it then refers the researcher to any discussion of the topic in *American Jurisprudence* or related books, specific cases, and practice materials such as forms, as well as any *ALR* annotations on the topic. The *ALR Digest* is helpful for locating other practice materials if, in fact, there is no *ALR* annotation on the subject.

To find the discussion of any other legal issue, or if you are not sure whether it is governed by state or federal law:

- If you are looking for the discussion of a specific federal or state law, regulation, uniform law or model act, Restatement section or code of ethics, go to the combined *ALR Index* for *ALR 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th* and *ALR Federal* (at the end of *ALR 6th*, at KF 132.6.A544). The last volume of this index is a table of laws, codes and regulations, and directs you to the most recent annotation discussing each. Unlike the *ALR Federal*, there is no “Table of Cases” after 1965 (the end of *ALR 2d*), so if you have a specific case, you will need to look for it by its subject matter. If you have a case from before this date, you may look it up in the Table of Cases contained in the *Digest* for the *ALR 1st* (1919-1948) and *ALR 2d* (1948-1965), at the end of each set.
- If you do not have a specific statute or regulation to research, look in the combined *ALR Quick Index* (at the end of the *ALR 5th*, at KF 132.6.A543), and try to find the topic there. This index covers the *ALR 3d, 4th* and *5th*.
- If you cannot find what you are seeking in the *ALR Quick Index*, take a look at the combined *ALR Index* for *ALR 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th* and *ALR Federal* (at KF 132.6 .A544, at the end of *ALR 6th*). This index is more detailed than the *Quick Index*, and unlike the *Quick Index*, also covers the *ALR 2d* and *ALR Federal*.
- Finally, if you have been unable to find your topic in either the *Quick Index* or the combined *ALR Index*, look in the *ALR Digest* (at the end of the *ALR 4th*, at KF 132.A5413). It covers the *ALR 3d, 4th, 5th* and *ALR Federal*. Like a state digest or the *Federal Practice Digest*, the digest breaks many areas of law down into small, discrete



topics, and then for each topic refers the researcher to any discussion of the topic in *American Jurisprudence* or related books, specific cases, and practice materials such as forms, as well as any *ALR* annotations on the topic. The digest is helpful for locating other practice materials if, in fact, there is no *ALR* annotation on the subject.

For example: If you are looking for a discussion of the legality of prayer in public schools, you might look in the *ALR Federal Quick Index* under “Separation of Church and State – Public Schools – Prayer.” This refers you to 110 ALR Fed 211. This citation means that you should go to volume 110 of *ALR Federal*, page 211, where you will find statutes, cases, other materials and analyses in a comprehensive annotation. Interestingly, if you look in the combined *ALR Quick Index*, which indexes *ALR* 3rd, 4th and 5th, but not *ALR Federal*, you will find a different citation: 30 ALR 3d 1352. Thus, there are two different discussions of this issue in the *ALR* series, and it could be useful to look at both.

Updating Your Research:

Because *ALR* annotations are continually being updated, once you have found a helpful annotation, it is important to determine whether it has been replaced or updated.

- The last volume of the combined *ALR Index* (at KF 132.6.A544, at the end of *ALR* 5th) contains an Annotation History Table showing whether an annotation has been supplemented or superseded. Check this table to see whether the annotation you are looking at has been superseded by a more recent annotation.
- Even if your annotation has not been replaced, it might have been updated with new cases or other information. *ALR* 1st annotations are updated in the six-volume *ALR Blue Book of Supplemental Decisions* at the end of the *ALR* 1st set. *ALR* 2d is updated by the *ALR 2d Later Case Service* at the end of that set. *ALR* 3d, *ALR* 4th, *ALR* 5th, *ALR* 6th and *ALR Federal* all contain annual pocket supplements in the back of each book.

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