Secondary Sources: Law Reviews

Law reviews are secondary sources that provide commentary on a specific area of the law. There are several hundred journals published by law schools and commercial publishers throughout the United States and the rest of the world. Georgetown subscribes to virtually all of them. The articles in law reviews are usually written on narrow legal topics and treat the topic in question comprehensively.

Law reviews can provide a good starting point when researching an area of law that is new to you. The articles explain and analyze the law and the extensive footnotes can lead you to additional primary and secondary sources.

Many law reviews are available on Lexis, Westlaw, and other electronic database subscriptions available through the library’s website. More importantly, the Hein Online database provides PDF files of almost all U.S. law reviews back to their first issues. Occasionally, if you need to find an older issue of a more obscure law review, you may have to consult the bound volumes located on the first floor of the Williams Library.

There are several ways to find on-point law review articles:

First, there are two specialized indexes for legal literature: Legal Periodicals and Books and LegalTrac. These indexes share some similar features: both are available from the library’s website, both index the vast majority of law reviews published by both law schools and commercial publishers, both allow you to search via a variety of fields, and both are updated online daily.

There are also some differences between these two databases: Legal Periodicals and Books indexes articles published from 1982 to the present. It has a companion historical database, Index to Legal Periodicals Retrospective which indexes articles from 1908 through 1981. LegalTrac’s coverage begins in 1980 and indexes more titles than Legal Periodicals and Books, including many bar journals and legal newspapers.

Let’s locate some law review articles on the PGA Tour v. Martin decision.

Beginning with Legal Periodicals and Books, we will start by selecting it from the list of frequently used databases on the Library’s Research page. We will run a simple search for PGA Martin in the primary search box.

A basic search retrieved 57 articles on the decision. You can use the facets on the left to narrow your results if you wish. If you click into the article you can view the bibliographic entry – any blue keywords under Subjects can be selected to identify other articles on that point.

If Legal Periodicals and Books does not have a copy of the article itself, you can use the article’s citation or the Find Full Text button to retrieve it from HeinOnline.

Running a similar search in LegalTrac, you should un-click “Peer Reviewed” as most law reviews are not run under the peer review standard. Here we retrieve 17 results. We can also narrow our search to articles that discuss this specific case by expanding the subjects area on the right and hovering over “Professional Golfers” – you can see the expanded title is the name of the case.

If you already have a citation to a promising law review article, you can retrieve it using HeinOnline’s Citation navigator – click here if you want to launch the HeinOnline tutorial in a new window.
Another way to find law review articles is by searching the full-text law review databases on Lexis and Westlaw. However, their coverage of law reviews is not as extensive as Hein’s.

If you are researching a statute, you can check Context & Analysis for law review articles that cite the statute.

Lastly, some secondary sources will contain cross-references to law review articles either in the text or the sidebar.