Secondary Sources: American Law Reports

The *American Law Reports*, also known as ALR, might look a lot like AmJur or the CJS at first blush. However, ALR is distinguished from these two sources by its extensive annotations. The term “annotation” as used in the ALR is a bit misleading since the annotations are, in fact, lengthy articles that treat a narrow topic in great detail. ALR annotations combine all the best features of a case report, a law review article, and a legal encyclopedia article.

As background, a numbered series of *American Law Reports* began publication in 1919. ALR is now on its sixth series, known as ALR 6th. There are also two federal series which began publication in 1969 and are known as ALR Fed and ALR Fed 2d. Prior to 1969, federal issues were treated as part of the main series.

To begin researching the ALR in print, consult the index, which covers all series of the main ALR and ALR Fed and features extensive cross-references and details to help focus a research topic. ALR volumes are shelved in the reading room of the Williams Library.

The ALR is also available on Westlaw and Lexis. Since the annotations are so long and detailed, it is often best to limit your search to the title field, at least at first. You can also search for references to a specific case name, if you have one, to see if any ALR annotations analyze that specific decision.

To do these two types of searches, first navigate to the ALR. You can do this either by typing ALR or American Law in the search bar and selecting the name of the resource from the suggestions, or click on Secondary Sources, and American Law Reports.

To search just the title field, click “Advanced” and enter the terms you want to search using terms and connectors. This particular search retrieves a single ALR annotation.

In contrast, if we run the same search in the full text of the ALR, we get over 90 results. Neither way of searching is objectively correct in every circumstance – you may have to try a few different searches, using various terms and techniques to find what you want.

Alternatively, since we have the case name *PGA Tour v. Martin*, we can search for that. Note that Westlaw gives you some context around the results. The amount of context can be adjusted to show you more or less detail. If we click into the annotation, we can also jump directly to our search terms using this tool. A few clicks gets us to the discussion of the case, which will quickly summarize the facts and legal theories.