What are ALRs?

American Law Reports (ALR) is a multi-volume set of research papers or “annotations” covering a broad range of topics. Written by attorneys, the annotations analyze case decisions, often covering timely or controversial issues. A typical annotation discusses a leading case, summarizes related cases, and reviews how various jurisdictions have treated the issues presented. When jurisdictions vary in treatment of an issue, the authors attempt to reconcile the variations into a coherent body of case law. The lead cases are reprinted in full along with suggestions for further research.

Originally, ALRs combined both federal and state topics into a single series, but since 1969 they have been separated. State series annotations will include federal cases when they are relevant to the discussion. In general, researchers find the later series to be most helpful for locating current information, and this Pathfinder concentrates on the 2nd-5th and Federal series.

ALR Indexes and Digests make it easy to locate topics and cases in the various series. Information on finding ALR annotations is on page 2.

How are ALRs useful?

ALRs are especially useful at the beginning of a research project. They provide an overview of a topic, discuss lead cases, and review how various jurisdictions have treated the issues presented. They can be helpful as a case-finder. They also refer to other secondary resources for continuing research.

ALR annotations do not have mandatory or persuasive authority in themselves. However, they can expedite the search for the proper authority.

Print ALRs are available in the Law Library at the locations listed below.

ALR series, dates, topic coverage, and Law Library location

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Finding ALR topics and cases

Several indexes and digests are available to assist researchers in locating information in the ALRs, but the ALR Index is an excellent starting point for most users.

**ALR Index**

The 6-volume ALR Index lists in alphabetical order all the topics and keywords covered in the 2nd-5th and Federal series. Detailed cross-references help the user find the most useful topics and then locate the annotations on those topics.

The ALR Index uses the citation format to direct users to the desired annotations. For example, the citation, 36 ALR Fed 626, directs the user to the ALR Federal series, volume 36, page 626. The citation, 12 ALR4th 96, refers to the 4th ALR series, volume 12, page 96. The spines of all the ALRs are clearly stamped with series and volume numbers.

At the back of the ALR Index is an “Annotation History Table” that lists superceded or outdated annotations.

The ALR Index is updated by a pocket part.

**ALR Quick Indexes**

The one-volume Quick Indexes include the main topics covered in the ALR Index but not all the detail and cross-references. As their name states, they are useful for a quick referral when the researcher is sure of the topic. A separate Quick Index for the Federal series is shelved with that series.

**ALR Digests**

The ALR Digest to 3rd, 4th, 5th and Federal series provides summaries of ALR annotations and cases. It is divided into 400 topic areas arranged alphabetically. The 400 topics are listed at the beginning of each Digest volume. For researchers accustomed to the digest format, this is a useful tool. For those new to legal research, the ALR Index is an easier starting point.

**ALR QUICK TIPS**

- Don’t know where to start? Try the ALR Index.
- Can’t find the ALR Index? It’s in row 22.
- Can’t find your ALR citation in the volumes? Be sure you are looking in the right series.
- Can’t find the Federal series? It’s in row 16 with other federal materials.
- Aren’t sure if your annotation is up to date? Don’t just guess or hope it is! See below for updating information.

MSU-DCL Reference Librarians will gladly assist you with any research or other reference questions.

**Updating Your ALR Research**

ALR prides itself on publishing timely information quickly. But the cases annotated often involve some controversy and are prone to being overruled or superceded. There are several tools available to check the status of a case or annotation:

- Pocket parts update the 3rd - 5th and Federal series.
- The ALR Index “Annotation History Table” lists superceded annotations.
- There is a Shepherd’s Citations for Annotations shelved near the ALR Digest in row 22.
- Call the “Latest Case Service Hotline” for most recent case information. The phone number is listed in the pocket parts to the 3rd-5th and the Federal series.