What are journal articles?

Journals are publications that contain multiple articles written by various authors.

They come out periodically as issues, which are then combined into annual volumes.

Journals are a good source of current information and often contain original research.

Why are they useful?

✓ Provide comprehensive overview or analysis of specific areas of law or legal principles
✓ Find commentary on case law or legislation
✓ Identify recent developments in law and learn of suggested reforms
✓ Provide ideas and support for your own arguments when writing essays

How do you search for journal articles?

The easiest way to search for journal articles is to use a database.

Databases are online indexes of journal articles and other publications, such as book chapters, government and law reform reports, and conference papers.

When such material is published, details about them are added to different databases. This detail usually includes:

  - Title and author
  - Source – ie where it was published
  - Brief summary or abstract describing what the article is about

Other databases also include the full-text of the entire journal article for you to read online with no further hunting.
AGIS Plus Text
This is the Attorney-General's Information Service. It indexes 139 journals, including all law journals from Australia. Plus, it provides details of book chapters, conference papers, government reports, etc. It is the best search tool to find articles on any aspect of Australian law.

Google Scholar
This free search tool allows you to find references to academic books, journal articles, conference papers, research and government reports, and other scholarly material. Excellent for researching international and comparative legal issues. Please note: Google Scholar can see into many different subscription databases, but not too many law ones.

LegalTrac
Contains details of articles from over 800 legal journals worldwide. It primarily covers US publications, but does include principal legal journals from Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand.

HeinOnline, Lexis.com, and Westlaw International
These databases contain the full-text of many US and international law journals.

CaseBase Journal Articles
This database provides brief details of articles that have considered cases indexed in CaseBase. Search for the case and look at the table of ‘Journals (or Publications) referring to this case’.

FindIt@Flinders
FindIt@Flinders works much like Google Scholar in that it tells you about articles available from a range of different databases. But, again like Google Scholar, not very many law databases are captured.
How to access databases
1. Go to the Library homepage at www.flinders.edu.au/library
2. Click on Databases (under Finding)
3. Type in the name of the database and click on the title

Which database should you use?
This really depends on the information you require.
e.g. if you are only interested in information about Australian law, use AGIS.
e.g. if you want to find articles about a case, use CaseBase
e.g. if you want to learn how the law works in another country, try Google Scholar, LegalTrac, Hein Online, etc.

How to find the most relevant articles
Figure out what keywords to use
This can be the trickiest part. Remember, authors do not use the same terminology, so try different words for the same concept. If you are not sure, check your textbooks or reader to see what terms are commonly used.

Put your search together using Boolean connectors
These connectors help the database understand what combination of words you want. Use:
- AND between different concepts
- OR between words for the same concept
- NEAR to find words close together
  (defamation OR slander OR libel ) AND (free OR freedom) NEAR speech

If you are getting too few results
- Use broader terminology – e.g. ‘negligence’ instead of ‘duty of care’
- Look at articles that do look interesting and search for the terms they use
- Don’t search for too many concepts at once – simplify your search

If you are getting too many results
- Use more specific terminology
- Identify one aspect of the topic you could focus on
- Try limiting your search by date (if appropriate)
How to find the full-text of articles

In the database you’re searching
Sometimes the full –text of an article will be made available on the database you have searched.
Look for a HTML or PDF link.

In another database
Other times, the full-text might be available through another database.
Click on the FindIt@Flinders link – if the article is available elsewhere, this will take you to it.

In print, in the Library
If the article is not available online, it may be available in print.
When you click on the FindIt@Flinders link, there may just be a ‘Get It’ option.
If this says the journal is available in the Library…

1. Note down the publication details of the article you want
2. Write down the location number
3. Go to the journals collection and find the journal using this location number
4. Get the relevant volume and flip to the page number given in the citation

No longer using a database?
Looking for a journal article referenced in your topic guide or bibliography?

You can easily find these by using the FindIt@Flinders.

1. Search FindIt@Flinders for
   a. the journal title – use ‘Books, journals, DVDs, & more’
   b. the title of the article – use ‘Search all’
2. If it is available online, you will see a record which says Online access.
   Click on the View online – this will generally take you to a list of years or volumes you can browse
3. If it is available in print, follow the steps listed above.