

# Using law reports

This guide will help you understand English case law references and confidently find and use cases in law reports

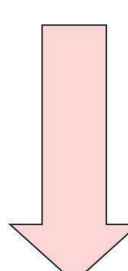
## Introduction to law reports

“A law report re-prints the full text of a judgement, i.e. the statement of facts and judicial reasoning made by judges in a case and adds additional material. This consists of a summary of the legal issues, lists of other cases cited, legislation referred to, and other key features of the case”<sup>1</sup>

They are a valuable and reputable source of information about cases and provide a stepping stone to other related cases or journal articles. There are a number of series of law reports and they are available online via Lexis+ and Westlaw.

## The hierarchy of law reports

There is a recognised hierarchy of law reports, with those at the top of the diagram below considered more authoritative than those lower down. Not every case is reported in every series of law reports. All of these are good sources of law but, when there's a choice, you should use the most authoritative source available when citing a case in your work. This is particularly important to remember if you are mooting.

<b>The Law Reports</b>	These cover all areas of law. They are split into four series: <b>AC, Ch, Fam and KB</b> . When we had a Queen, there was also QB (Queen's Bench). Use Westlaw or Lexis+ to find cases in any of these series.	<p>Most authoritative</p>  <p>Least authoritative</p>
<b>Weekly Law Reports (WLR)</b>	This covers all areas of law. Use Westlaw or Lexis+ to find cases in the Weekly Law Reports	
<b>All England Law Reports (All ER)</b>	This covers all areas of law. Use Lexis+ to find cases in the All England Law Reports	
<b>Specialised law reports</b>	There are lots of these. Each one usually focuses on a single practice area. Examples include Family Law Reports or Environmental Law Reports. Use Lexis+ or Westlaw to find these	

The set of law reports called simply The Law Reports has been published since 1865 by the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting (ICLR). If you look in the alphabetical list under **cases** on Lexis+

<sup>1</sup> John Knowles and Philip A. Thomas, *Effective Legal Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Sweet & Maxwell 2012) 25

the names of the series start with ICLR e.g. ICLR Chancery Division. There are 4 series in The Law Reports:

**Appeal Cases (AC)**  
**Chancery Division (Ch)**  
**King's Bench Division (KB)**  
**Family Division (Fam)**

It is usual for just the name of the series (e.g. AC) to be given in a reference so you need to remember that these four form part of The Law Reports and therefore sit at the top of the hierarchy.

## Understanding references to law reports

References to law reports can look like a secret code, but, as you become more familiar with them they will start to make sense. The information within each reference (also known as a citation) appears in a standard order.

The title of the law report series is often abbreviated. If you are not sure what an abbreviation is short for, consult the Cardiff Index to Legal Abbreviations (<http://www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk/>).

Cicccone v Ritchie [2016] 4 WLR 60



Cicccone v Ritchie	The names of the two parties in the case
[2016]	The year that the case was reported.
4	The volume number. This was the 4 <sup>th</sup> volume published in 2016
WLR	The abbreviated title of series of law reports. WLR is Weekly Law Reports
60	The page the case starts on

## Neutral citations

All cases heard in the High Court, Court of Appeal or House of Lords/Supreme Court since 2001 have been given a neutral citation. This citation reflects where and when the case was heard, not where it was reported. It means that even if a case is not reported in the law reports it can be identified and referenced. You can spot a neutral citation as it will have EW [for England and Wales] or UK in it. This is the neutral citation for the same case as above:

Cicccone v Ritchie [2016] EWHC 608 (Fam)



Cicccone v Ritchie	The names of the two parties in the case
[2016]	The year that the case was heard.
EWHC	The court. Here it is the England & Wales High Court
608	Each case is given a unique identification number. This was the 608 <sup>th</sup> case heard in this court in 2016
(Fam)	The division of the High Court – in this case the Family Division

The most common abbreviations you will see in neutral citations are:

UKSC	Supreme Court
UKHL	House of Lords
EWCA Crim	Court of Appeal (Criminal Division)
EWCA Civ	Court of Appeal (Civil Division)
EWHC (Admin)	High Court (Administrative Court)
EWHC (Ch)	High Court (Chancery Division)
EWHC (QB)	High Court (Queen's Bench Division)
EWHC (Fam)	High Court (Family Division)
EWHC (KB)	High Court (King's Bench Division)

## Referencing cases using OSCOLA

There is detailed information about referencing cases in section 2.1 of the OSCOLA handbook.

There is also a very useful video on the library's YouTube channel called How to Reference English Cases. Find it at <https://youtu.be/ywek-0q8INU>

## Finding law reports online

The two recommended resources for finding law reports online are Lexis+ and Westlaw. The library has purchased subscriptions to both of these databases for you. It is important you access them via the library website rather than Google search results so that you are recognised as being from Oxford Brookes.

Go to <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/resources-and-services/course-resource-help/law> and click on the Westlaw and Lexis+ buttons at the top to access these databases and to find out more about how to use them.

Once in Lexis+ or Westlaw, you can either search by parties e.g. Cicccone v Ritchie or by citation e.g. [2016] 4 WLR 60. You can use either a neutral citation or a law report citation in the citation field. If you get no results, try removing brackets from your citation.

You may find it easier to search by citation as there may have been more than one case involving the parties, especially if there was an appeal. Also in family law, the parties can be given one letter names, which can make cases hard to distinguish by party name alone.

## Other resources

There are some useful books on law study skills, which will have a section on finding and using cases. Find them on [the Law Study Sills reading list](#).

## Getting help and finding out more

More information and support can be found on the law page of the library website: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/resources-and-services/course-resource-help/law>