If you are unfamiliar with an area of law, then going straight to a relevant case or piece of legislation won’t throw much light on the issues, because you don’t have the background to put that information into context. Instead, start with some basic commentary.

### HOW CAN I FIND AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC AND AN OUTLINE OF THE LEGAL PRINCIPLES INVOLVED?
- Start with textbooks and course readings. Use the table of contents or index to find relevant information.
- Search the library catalogue to find more texts on your topic and, when you find something relevant, browse the shelves around that call number.
- Legal encyclopaedias (such as *Laws of Australia* or *Halsbury’s Laws of Australia*), can provide a simple outline of the legal principles involved.

### HAS THIS WORD OR PHRASE BEEN LEGALLY DEFINED (IN CASE LAW OR IN LEGISLATION)?
Check the legal meaning of any words or phrases that are central to your topic in:
- Case citators (Firstpoint in Westlaw AU and CaseBase in Lexis Advance Pacific)
- Australian legal encyclopaedias (*Laws of Australia* and *Halsbury’s Laws of Australia*)
- Australian Legal Words & Phrases (in Lexis Advance Pacific)

### HAS THERE BEEN AN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT OR PARLIAMENTARY REPORT ON THIS MATTER?
Check the Parliamentary websites for committee reports and Bills Digests, which are an excellent source of information about the history of an issue.

### HAS THERE BEEN DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE BY THE LEGAL PROFESSION OR LAW REFORM GROUPS?
- Law Societies may provide practical insights into the operation of the law.
- Law Reform Commissions provide cutting edge commentary on reform issues.

### HAS THERE BEEN ACADEMIC DISCUSSION IN JOURNALS ON THE TOPIC?
Use Australian journal databases to locate articles discussing Australian legal issues, cases or legislation. Full text coverage varies in each database.
- AGIS Plus Text
- Lexis Advance Pacific
- Westlaw AU
- AustLII
- HeinOnline
  International collection of law and law related journals. Coverage includes U.S.A., Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

Follow up the additional articles and texts from the reference lists of relevant articles as these will often lead you to further relevant discussion.
WHAT ABOUT NEWSPAPER ARTICLES? HAS THIS ISSUE BEEN DEBATED IN THE PRESS?

Commentary in newspaper articles can be particularly relevant to research on law reform issues, political analysis, public affairs and court cases that have received high levels of media attention.

- **ANZ Newsstand** provides full-text articles from major Australian and New Zealand newspapers (includes radio transcripts and news from current affairs television programs such as the ABC 7.30 Report).
- **Newspaper Source Plus** wide range of full-text international newspapers, including Australian titles.
- **Australian Public Affairs Full Text** (1978+) some full-text from major Australian newspapers.
- **ProQuest** range of full-text international newspapers.
- **Westlaw** wide range of full-text international newspapers, including Australian titles.

WHERE CAN I FIND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE FROM OVERSEAS JURISDICTIONS?

Law-related articles from overseas jurisdictions are in the following databases:

- **HeinOnline** archival database of (mainly) US law journals usually Vol 1 onwards.
- **Index to Legal Periodicals and Books Full-Text** all aspects of law (mostly US) indexed from 1908, some full-text from 1994.
- **Westlaw** international content; includes law journal indexes & several full-text journals.
- **Lexis Advance US Research** (access via Lexis Advance Pacific) mainly US content, includes a number of full-text journals.

Check the Law Secondary Sources Guide for details of other databases which may contain law-related articles.

HOW CAN I GET HOLD OF THE FULL-TEXT OF AN ARTICLE IF I ONLY HAVE THE CITATION?

1. Make sure you’ve recorded the full article citation including the journal name, volume, year & pages.
2. For abbreviated journal title citations (e.g. ALJ or CrimLaw) you’ll need to check the title using an abbreviations index.
3. Use the Library catalogue to search for the journal title.
4. Use the Get It online requesting service to request journal articles not available in the UON Libraries.
5. Come and see Library staff in the Service Zone on level 1 in the Newcastle City Campus Library or use the ‘Ask the Library’ link on the Library homepage. Sometimes a journal name changes or alterations to database coverage may take time to be picked up in the Library catalogue (NewCat+).