

What is a Law Report?

Law Reports are simply volumes of books in which judgments (decisions of courts) have been compiled, indexed and published. Law Reports are published regularly and generally contain the text of judgments along with "catchwords" (subject headings which describe the case) and "headnotes" which provide a convenient summary of the presiding judges, issues, facts and decisions of each case.

Law reports by jurisdiction

Here in Australia each jurisdiction has a law report which is specific to that jurisdiction, so in the jurisdiction of South Australia for example, the *South Australian State Reports* report (publish) the decisions of the Supreme Court of South Australia.

Law reports by subject

There are also subject specific reports such as the *Australian Torts Reports*, *Australian Corporations and Securities Reports* and *Family Law Reports* which collect decisions on a particular area of law, and might cover several jurisdictions.

Format of a law report

Case name

The case name contains the name of the parties to the case and this information is found on the first page. As many law reports cover the appellate courts, these parties might be referred to as **appellant** and **respondent**.

Citation

The citation to the case can usually be found at the top of the second page. This is probably the most important information for identifying and finding the case.

Court

The court, and the judges who sat on the case.

Date

There are usually at least 2 dates provided; these are the dates/s of the hearing of the case, and the date on which the judgment was handed down.

Catchwords

The catchwords are often *italicised* and comprise subject terms which describe the case. The catchwords are useful in legal research in that you can use these catchwords to search for other relevant cases dealing with similar legal issues.

Headnotes

The headnote is a brief summary of the case giving a brief statement of the material facts; a brief summary of the decision; and the authorities referred to in the decision. An authority is simply citation to case law or legislation relevant to the decision.

Procedural history

This provides information on the history of the case, usually from what lower court the case is on appeal.

Counsel

Barristers who represented the parties in court.

Summary of argument of counsel

This summary of the arguments laid by both parties before the court are provided in only a few report series, including the CLRs and the ACs.

Decision, including summary of material facts

This is the actual decision (judgment) of the court. It is common for appellate court decisions to include more than one decision if the judges write one or more separate reasons for decision.

Orders of the court

This is the order the court makes and is usually found on the final page of the law report.

How to cite a Case

The following is an example of a case citation:

