Quick guide to Law Reports.

What is a law report?
Law reports reprint the full text of a judgement, and include the facts of the case and the judicial reasoning. Additional notes summarise the legal principles, and reports also list the cases and legislation referred to. In England and Wales only a small number of cases are reported, usually from the higher courts: all cases from the Supreme Court, most cases from the Court of Appeal, and some High Court cases. Some specialist tribunal cases are also reported. Cases are reported if they have significant legal interest, signify a change in the law, clarify a difficult principle or interpret legislation. They are printed by private publishers and since 1865, a semi-official charitable body called the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting. Less than 5% of cases get reported. Law reports have existed since the 13th century so you can find details of very old cases!

The Law Reports. The Law Reports are published by the ICLR and are checked by the judge overseeing the case. They aim to include all cases that establish new or modified legal principles, or are in other ways considered legally important, and are considered to be the most authoritative of all the reports series.

General and Specialist reports. There are many other series of reports which can be seen as ‘general’ or ‘specialist’ series. An example of a general series is the All England Law Reports, which covers major, significant cases. Specialist reports focus on cases relating to a specific area of law, and may include cases heard in the lower courts.

Transcripts. If the case has not been officially reported in a law report series (‘unreported’), you may be able to find an official transcript which will provide the full text of the judgement. Lawtel UK is one source of unreported law reports.

What is a citation? A legal citation is a signpost which directs you to a specific publication. It may refer to a case report, journal article, or entry in a legal yearbook or encyclopedia. Citations follow a standard format and should be used in your own work. A single case can be reported in a number of different law reports.

Abbreviations. These are used in citations to shorten the reference. Some abbreviations will become familiar (eg. WLR) but you may need to look up others. To find what an abbreviation stands for, use the Cardiff Index to legal Abbreviations (online) or Raistrick’s Index to Legal Citations and Abbreviations, available in the law library. Law textbooks also usually give a list of common abbreviations.

What information does a citation provide?
Eg. Carlill v. Carbolic Smoke Ball Company [1893] 1 QB 256

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Party Names are of the people involved in the case. In civil law, this will be the claimant and the defendant. If the Party Name is simply listed as R, this represents Rex or Regina,
depending on whether there was a King or Queen on the throne at the time of the case. Criminal cases are brought on behalf of the crown (R).

**Date reported:** This is the year that the case was reported – not necessarily the year that the case was heard. This is always enclosed in brackets. Square brackets are used when the year is used to locate the report: *Secretary of State for Defence v. Percy [1999] 1 All ER 732*. There are 3 volumes for every year of the ALL ER, and every year has a volume 1, so you need to know both the year and the volume number. Round brackets are used when the date is not needed to find a report but simply tells you the date that the case was reported: *R v Francis Ingham (1859) 169 ER 1221*. The English Reports are numbered using a continuous sequence, and cases from different years can be reported in the same volume. There is only one volume 169.

**Report Series:** eg. *(QBD)* The title of the law report series will usually be in abbreviated form, for example: Weekly Law Reports (WLR), All England Law Reports (ALL ER), English Reports (ER). Eg. *Webb v EMO Air Cargo (UK) Ltd [1993] 1 WLR 49*

**Page or paragraph number:** eg. *256*

This is the page number, but it also might refer to the paragraph number.

**Nominate Report Citations (reprinted in the English Reports):** These are pre-1865 cases written by various court reporters, which have been reprinted in the English Reports (ER). The citation may cause difficulties because it directs you to the original reports, not the reprinted version. The best sources for this information are Raistrick (see below), the printed guide ‘Table of English Reports’ available in the law library, or online using the Cardiff index to Legal Abbreviations.

Eg. *R v Exall (1866) 4 F & F 922*

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F&F is the name of the original Nominate Report. To find the volume of the English Reports in which this has been reprinted, you must consult the Table of English Reports, , or look up the case in the English Reports Index, volumes 177 & 178.

**Neutral Citations:** Neutral Citations were introduced in 2001 by the House of Lords, the Court of Appeal and the High Court. Rather than referring to a specific law report series, the case citation will instead refer to the court. Instead of a page number they refer to a case number. This is because of the high number of cases now appearing on free case databases available on the Internet.

The usual format of a neutral citation is: *Party Name v Party Name, Year – enclosed in square brackets [ ], Name of Court (abbreviated), Case Number.*

**Note: a neutral citation is not a reference to a law report series.**

Eg. *Royal Bank of Scotland plc v. Etridge [2001] UKHL 44*

UK indicates that the court’s jurisdiction extends to the whole of the UK: this also might states EW for England and Wales. HL indicates that the case was heard in the House of Lords. 44 relates to the case number, allocated to the case.

To find a case with a neutral citation, use online services such as Westlaw, LNB, or one of the high quality free sites such as BAILLI.