Kent Law School Skills Hub

Reading Legal Materials

You’ll encounter a range of materials in your studies. This guide outlines the pros and cons of each.

Textbooks

👍 Textbooks are the basis of module learning, and you will often rely on core texts for seminars.
👍 Textbooks provide a comprehensive outline of a subject, introducing the key cases and legislation that establish relevant legal principles, and sometimes critically analysing them.
👎 Textbooks often provide you with a starting point, but their scope means that any analysis is often too brief to be useful when preparing for some assessments and exams.
👎 Textbooks go out of date, so you need check that you are citing “good law”.

Casebooks

👍 Casebooks provide a more detailed discussion of landmark cases, using excerpts to identify the key passages of the judgment.
👎 Of course, casebooks provide less detail than cases themselves. Where you need more than a basic understanding of a case (e.g. when writing a case note), you should read the full judgment yourself.

Cases and Legislation (Primary Sources of English Law)

👍 It is cases and legislation (not textbooks) that establish authoritative legal principles.
👍 Cases tell stories, showing you how the law has been applied in the real world.
👍 Judges will usually provide an explanation of the relevant legal principles and their history, helping you to deepen your understanding of the law.
👍 Comments made obiter in judgments sometimes critique the law or provide an indication as to possible future developments, which can help to build your own analysis in assessments.
👎 Primary sources are often lengthy and you will not always have time to read them in full. Using other resources (including the case summaries) can help you to decide which sources to read.

Journal Articles (including Case Notes)

👍 Articles are usually written by specialists in an area of law, including lawyers and academics.
👍 Articles usually focus on analysing (rather than explaining) particular issues or principles, and can help you to better develop your own opinion, and your arguments in assessments.
👍 By looking at which books, articles or primary sources the author is citing, you can further your own research when reading around a subject or completing assessments.
👎 Many articles are written for readers with an existing knowledge of the area.

Blog Posts and Online Sources

👍 Blog posts are short, simple and can keep up-to-date with developments.
👎 Blogs do not usually face the same academic scrutiny as books/articles. Is the author credible? Are they an academic or lawyer, or do dey rite lyk dis? You need to form a judgement.

Kent Law School Skills Hub