Locating Paper Topics Using BNA Publications

A Guide for Law Students

BNA is the leading publisher of print and electronic news and legal analysis, offering intensive coverage of developments in law and regulation for more than 80 years. BNA publishes more than 350 print and electronic titles which offer authoritative insights on hot topics and emerging trends in law today. A full list of BNA titles can be found at www.bna.com.

Several types of BNA publications are in your library or available electronically through your law library’s website.

Current Report Services are substantive notification/current awareness services that are published daily, weekly (most common), biweekly, or monthly.

Looseleaf Services can be found online or in print, as multiple-binder sets or wire-bound Portfolios.

BNA Resource Centers are comprehensive websites by subject that integrate news, expert analysis, and practice tools.

BNA Books are treatises that cover a specific subject area in depth.

The print or electronic Current Report Services will yield the greatest number of paper topics and should be the first place to look among BNA publications. These services cover such topics as intellectual property, health law, securities law, and dozens of other areas.

How to Use BNA Publications to Find Paper Topics

Focus on one area of the law by subject, such as bankruptcy or antitrust, and restrict your search to the BNA publication on that topic.

Most BNA publications have the name of an area of law in the title. This makes finding the best publication easy if you are writing a paper for a class on a specific topic or have a sense of what area you would like to explore. Contact your reference librarian if you are not sure which publication to choose.

Alternatively, use The United States Law Week®, a general service that covers all areas of the law.

Every law school has Law Week, often known and cited as U.S.L.W. It has two parts: Case Alert and Legal News (survey of current case law, and news developments such as congressional activity or agency action); and Supreme Court Today (all actions before the Supreme Court). Both parts are fully searchable through Law Week online.

You can start your search for a topic with Law Week, and then move to the specific BNA publication that covers the area that most interests you, such as employment law or privacy and security law, to get more ideas and cites to cases, laws, or regulations. Law Week publishes many articles on cases in which the courts have split or a new issue is addressed. These cases may eventually come before the Supreme Court and offer great paper ideas. Look for the link to Circuit Splits under the Key Features Section in Law Week online.
Tips on Using BNA Publications to Find Paper Topics

Scan the highlights of each issue.

This is the first page in the print version. Highlights in the electronic versions are located in the center of the screen, and are fully searchable. Pay particular attention to interesting cases decided by federal courts, cases in which circuits have split on an issue, cases of first impression, and important regulatory developments. Finding a case where the issue argued or theory of the suit is new is a great way to find a topic and limits the likelihood of being preempted.

Use the index to look for headings that are of interest to you.

Look in the index for different terms, including alternative forms of the same word or concept. Online indexes for BNA publications are fully searchable. The print index is usually published quarterly and is found under the index tab in the binder housing the print issues.

Search for a word or phrase if you have the electronic version of the publication available.

Standard search operators apply when searching BNA publications online. You might find it useful to run a word search after finding a case, regulation, or policy decision that interests you. The search may yield articles on the legal issue you have chosen or additional cases that are on point. Use the Search My BNA feature in the upper right of the online publications to search for all your schools’ BNA online publications in one easy search.

Finding BNA Publications at Your Law School

Ask your librarian what BNA services are in your library.

Many schools now have virtual reference desks where you can e-mail a librarian 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Search your law school library’s website.

You may find BNA listed under electronic resources or databases. Many law schools have separate listings just for BNA publications. You can usually link directly into these publications through the school’s network.

Check your library’s online catalog.

Search for “Bureau of National Affairs” or “BNA” in a word search, or a fielded search for publication name or title. Look for BNA titles that end with the word Report or Reporter, or for The United States Law Week®.

Citing BNA Publications

You generally do not need to cite BNA materials if you use them only to generate a good idea for a paper topic.

Topical articles published by BNA do not constitute preemption for purposes of selecting a unique topic for your note or law review article, any more than ideas generated by similar publications such as The National Law Journal, Legal Times, The New York Times, or The Los Angeles Times.

You should cite BNA materials when you quote language from a BNA publication, paraphrase words from a BNA article, or use unique ideas expressed by a BNA reporter or source. When in doubt, check with your professor or legal writing instructor. It is always better to cite a source and give credit, as failing to do so may constitute plagiarism.

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