

DISTINGUISHING SCHOLARLY FROM NON-SCHOLARLY PERIODICALS*

Journals and magazines are important sources for up-to-date information in all disciplines, but it is often difficult to distinguish between the various levels of scholarship available in them. In this study guide we have divided the criteria for periodical literature into four categories:

- Scholarly (may also be referred to as *peer-reviewed*, *refereed*, or *juried*)
- Substantive News or General Interest
- Popular
- Sensational

Webster's **Third International Dictionary** defines the above terms as follows:

Scholarly: 1) concerned with academic study, especially research, 2) exhibiting the methods and attitudes of a scholar, 3) having the manner and appearance of a scholar.

Substantive: having a solid base, being substantial.

Popular: fit for, or reflecting the taste and intelligence of, the people at large.

Sensational: arousing, or intending to arouse, strong curiosity, interest or reaction.

Note: Most "scholarly" articles go through a "peer-review" process, in which a panel of experts in that academic field read and evaluate the manuscript to decide whether or not it is a reliable source of information. The review board carefully investigates the author's assumptions, statements of fact, research methods, findings, and conclusions, to determine if the submission is acceptable for publication.

The criteria given below should help you to determine if an article is scholarly or non-scholarly. If you need further assistance, please consult a reference librarian.

SCHOLARLY

1. Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or exciting pictures.
2. An abstract is found at the beginning of each article.
3. Scholarly journals **always** cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies.
4. The titles of the articles reflect the content.
5. Articles are written by a scholar or by someone who has done research in a particular field, and the author's credentials are listed.

6. The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some scholarly background on the part of the reader.
7. The purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experimentation and make that information available to the rest of the scholarly world.
8. Many scholarly journals, though by no means all, are published by a specific professional organization.

Examples of Scholarly Journals

The American Journal of Sociology

JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association

Psychological Bulletin (published by the American Psychological Association)

Journal of Economic Perspectives

Journal of Marriage and the Family (published by the National Council on Family Relations)

Sex Roles: A Journal of Research

SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST

1. These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format. Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.
2. News and general interest periodicals usually do not cite sources.
3. Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar, or a freelance writer.
4. The language of these publications is geared to any educated audience. There is no specialty assumed, only interest and a certain level of intelligence.
5. Commercial enterprises or individuals generally publish them, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.
6. The main purpose of periodicals in this category is to provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens.

Examples of Substantive News/ General Interest Periodicals

Economist

New York Times Magazine

Newsweek

Psychology Today

Scientific American

Note: Many articles from non-scholarly magazines like *Economist*, *Psychology Today*, or *Scientific American* are very good and might contain information that could be very helpful to you,

even though the magazine is not a “scholarly publication.” Individual articles may be written by an expert in the discipline or by a journalist. Check with your professor if you have questions about using information from one of these sources.

POPULAR

1. Popular periodicals come in many formats, although often somewhat slick and attractive in appearance. They usually have many photographs, drawings, and other illustrations.
2. These publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information is often second or third hand, and the original source is sometimes obscure.
3. Articles are usually very short, written in simple language and are designed to meet a minimal education level. There is generally little depth to the content of these articles.
4. Articles are generally written by staff members or freelance writers, not by experts or researchers.
5. The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers'), and/or to promote a viewpoint.

Examples of Popular Periodicals

Family Circle
Sports Illustrated
Parents
People Weekly
Reader's Digest
Woman's Day

SENSATIONAL

1. Sensational periodicals come in a variety of styles, but often use a newspaper format.
2. Their language is elementary and occasionally inflammatory or sensational. They assume a certain gullibility in their audience.
3. The main purpose of sensational magazines seems to be to arouse curiosity and to cater to popular superstitions. They often do so with flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g. "Half-man Half-woman Makes Self Pregnant").

Examples of Sensational Periodicals

Globe
National Examiner
Star
Weekly World News

NOTE: King's College Library owns reference books that list and describe periodical titles. If you need further information about an individual title, we suggest you consult:

R
016.05
K159M

Magazines for Libraries

"...a selective annotated listing by subject of more than 6,950 journals chosen by experts in their fields." (Preface.) Each entry gives name of periodical, beginning publication date, publisher, editor, address, price, and such information as indexing, size, and level of audience. Short abstracts describe the scope, political slant, and other aspects of the publication. Arrangement is topical which brings magazines and journals on like subjects together. To find an individual title, one uses the title index at the end of the volume.

If you need further information about an individual title, ask your professor or a reference librarian for assistance.

*Adapted from materials developed by the URIS Undergraduate Library, Cornell University.

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