

Information Literacy 8
Scholarly Journal Articles vs. Popular Magazine Articles

Journal and magazine articles are important sources of current information in all subject areas. They are an invaluable information resource when researching a topic. You will often be asked to complete an assignment using articles from scholarly journals only. You need to learn to evaluate the level or quality of information found in magazine and journal articles and how to distinguish between scholarly journals and popular magazines.

Journals and magazines are paper or electronic publications that are issued on a regular basis (quarterly, bimonthly, monthly biweekly, weekly, etc). Librarians may refer to journals or magazines as “serials” because they are published in successive parts with numeric or chronological designations (dates of issue) and are intended to be continued indefinitely. The term “serial” also applies to newspapers, yearbooks, or any publication published continually in successive parts. This handout deals only with serials which are journals and magazines. Distinguishing between journals and magazines can be confusing. Many libraries have defined categories to help students understand the difference. Cornell University Library has come up with the following categories to help identify the different types of journals and magazines:

- ✓ **Scholarly**
- ✓ **Substantive News/ General Interest**
- ✓ **Popular**
- ✓ **Sensational**

Distinguishing between them can be a challenge as lines between types of journals and magazines are not always clear cut. Some general criteria and examples of the different categories are below.

Scholarly

- ◆ The covers of scholarly journals are usually very plain with very little color and have no photographs on the cover. Many covers include a listing of the articles inside the journal.
- ◆ Scholarly journals generally focus on one single topic or field of study.
- ◆ The articles usually include charts, graphs or tables. There are few photographs included.
- ◆ Scholarly journals have footnotes and bibliographies citing the authors’ sources.
- ◆ The articles are written by a scholar or someone who has done research in the field. Frequently the author’s name is followed by an abbreviation indicating the level of their education, PhD, MLS, RN. Sometimes a statement is given about the author’s current position or affiliation within a university/college or institution.
- ◆ The articles use terminology of the discipline or technical language.
- ◆ Scholarly journals publish original research. The text of research articles is divided into the following sections: introduction, review of the literature, research questions and/or hypotheses, methods, conclusion, discussion, references and notes.
- ◆ The articles are “peer reviewed” meaning that the editor of the publication evaluates the article and assigns another editor with a background in the field of study or experts who are not part of the editorial staff to review the article before it appears in the journal.
- ◆ Many scholarly journals are published by professional organizations or educational institutions.
- ◆ Examples of scholarly journals:
 - American Economic Review*
 - Journal of Educational Psychology*
 - Journal of the American Dietetic Association*
 - Modern Fiction Studies*
 - Virginia Quarterly Review*

Substantive News or General Interest

- ◆ These periodicals are more attractive in appearance and some are in newspaper format. These articles are often illustrated with photographs.
- ◆ Sometimes the articles are accompanied by short bibliographies or a list of sources.
- ◆ The author may be a scholar, a free lance writer or a member of the periodical staff.
- ◆ Generally these periodicals are commercially published, although some may be associated with a specific organization.
- ◆ The articles provide information in a general manner and usually lack the specialized terminology of a scholarly journal.
- ◆ Examples of substantive news or general interest periodicals:
Christian Science Monitor
CQ Researcher
Economist
National Geographic
Scientific American
Vital Speeches of the Day

Popular

- ◆ Popular magazines look slick and attractive in appearance. They contain lots of photographs or drawings which are often in color.
- ◆ The articles rarely have bibliographies. The articles contain information which has already appeared elsewhere. These articles do not contain original research.
- ◆ The language in the articles is usually simple without specialized terminology.
- ◆ The length of the articles is usually short and there is consequently little depth to the content.
- ◆ The purpose of popular magazines is to entertain the reader. They present articles of popular interest on a variety of subjects.
- ◆ Examples of popular magazines:
Ebony
Good Housekeeping
Parents
People
Readers Digest
Sports Illustrated
Time

Sensational

- ◆ Sensational magazines often use a newspaper format.
- ◆ The language is elementary and some might describe as inflammatory or sensational.
- ◆ The purpose of the magazines is to grab your attention or curiosity with hard to believe headlines and eye catching photographs.
- ◆ Examples of sensational magazines:
Globe
National Enquirer
Star

Still not sure?? Try these resources in the Library and on the Internet:

Magazines for Libraries. Z6941 .M23 Ask at the Reference Desk.

Scholarly Journal Article vs. Magazine Article; What's the Difference, and Who Cares?

<http://odin.indstate.edu/level1.dir/ljo.dir/indexes.html#SCHOLARLY>

Scholarly Journal v. Popular Magazine Articles.

<http://www.lib.utsa.edu/Research/Subject/scholarlyguide.html>

Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory. Z6941 .K2 Ask at the Reference Desk.