

# Scholarly Journals and Research Articles

## What is a Scholarly Journal?

As you do research for college projects, your professors may ask you to avoid using popular magazines, and may require you to find articles from scholarly journals instead. For some assignments, trade or professional journals may be appropriate. Here are some examples of each type.

- You are probably familiar with popular magazines: you have seen them at bookstores and public libraries, or perhaps you subscribe to one. They are written for a general audience, and their purpose is usually to inform or entertain.
- Scholarly journals are written for a much more specialized audience, and their purpose is to report original research and contribute new knowledge in a particular discipline or field. You will find plenty of scholarly journals in a university library, but you will not find them at your local newsstand.
- Trade or professional journals are also written for a specialized audience but tend to be more practical or "applied" in nature. These are usually aimed at people in a particular industry or profession.

## How Can I Tell the Difference?

Look at an issue of a periodical. Start by examining the editorial information (usually found in the first few pages of each issue). This way you can learn about the publisher, the stated purpose of the periodical, and editorial policies. You can determine the intended audience by scanning for the types of subjects covered, gauging the general tone, checking for specialized language or jargon, and looking at advertisements and illustrations.

	<b>POPULAR MAGAZINES</b>	<b>SCHOLARLY JOURNALS</b>	<b>TRADE JOURNALS</b>
<b>PURPOSE &amp; EDITORIAL CONVENTIONS</b>	News reports, commentary, and features for a general audience. Sometimes geared to special interests (science, business, social activism). Articles are usually written by staff writers.	Share the results of original research in order to contribute to the body of knowledge about a particular subject. Academic audience. Articles must frequently pass through a peer review process before being accepted for publication.	Provide information about current trends, news and events in a particular field or industry. Sometimes include statistics, forecasts, and product information.
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Journalists, freelance writers, commentators. Sometimes anonymous.	Researchers, scientists, scholars.	Practitioners or specialists in the field or industry, or journalists with subject expertise.
<b>REFERENCES</b>	Original sources are sometimes obscure; may	Authors cite their sources in footnotes or bibliographies,	Practices vary; some cite sources and

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	be mentioned but are rarely cited formally.	which are often extensive.	some do not.
TERMINOLOGY	Nontechnical; written for a general audience	Uses the technical vocabulary of the discipline; assumes college-educated reader with some knowledge of the subject.	Uses the jargon of the field.
PUBLISHERS	Commercial publishers	Professional organizations, universities, research institutes, scholarly presses	Commercial or trade publishers, professional associations
APPEARANCE	Colorful, glossy cover, many ads for consumer products, illustrations, photos.	Plain cover (usually), graphs, charts, tables and photographs. Few ads.	Charts, tables, illustrations. Ads related to the profession or industry.
EXAMPLES	Newsweek Sports Illustrated Rolling Stone Discover	Renaissance Quarterly Biochemistry Developmental Psychology Journal of Cultural Geography	RN Advertising Age Modern Machine Shop Progressive Grocer

### What Does "Peer Review" Mean?

Scholarly journals do not employ staff reporters to write articles. Instead, authors must submit their articles to scholarly journals for consideration. The editors of these journals employ a peer review or referee process to help them decide which articles to publish.

In the peer review process, a group of experts on the subject of the submitted article -- the author's peers -- are asked to read the draft and to recommend its publication, revision, or rejection. Because they are experts on the topic, they can evaluate the quality of the author's research and can determine the extent to which the article would add valuable new information to the field.

This process is meant to ensure high quality in scholarly sources. While some popular magazines may enjoy good reputations, none of them employs this kind of rigorous review process. If your professors advise you to use peer-reviewed (or refereed) journals in your research, it is because these journals can generally be trusted to present valid, reliable information.

### How Do I Identify Research Articles?

Research articles, or primary articles, are based on original research. Other kinds of articles appear in scholarly journals as well, including commentary and review articles. If you need to limit your sources to research articles, you must be able to tell the difference. Most research articles will contain the following:

## Scholarly Journals and Research Articles

### ABSTRACT

A summary of the article (note: abstracts appear in secondary articles as well)

### METHODS

Sometimes called "methodology" or "materials and methods," this section describes the author's research methods and tools: experiment, survey, data sources, etc.

### RESULTS

Also called "findings," this is the section of the article in which raw data are presented.

### DISCUSSION

Sometimes called "analysis," this is the section in which the author analyzes the data.

### CONCLUSION

The author's conclusions based on the analysis.

### REFERENCES

List of references to works cited in the article.

These standard parts of a research article may not always be labeled, and sometimes they are combined (for example, "Data and Methods"). Still, every research article indicates what methods and tools were used to conduct the research, what the results were, and how the author interprets those results.