



LIBRARY GUIDE

SCHOLARLY JOURNALS vs. POPULAR MAGAZINES

This handout is designed to help you select the type of article you need. Professors often ask you to use "scholarly" articles or journals for an assignment. It isn't always easy to know what that is. There are distinct characteristics for each type of magazine and this handout helps you distinguish between them.

First, is it a magazine? A journal? A periodical? A serial? These all mean that it is a source that is published periodically or, another way to say it, serially. Those called magazines are usually popular while those called journals are usually scholarly.

One way to tell if an article is popular or scholarly is how you find it. Most of the articles listed in academic databases, such as ProQuest, ERIC or PsychInfo are scholarly. Articles from some other databases can be scholarly or popular, while articles from the long-standing Reader's Guide are popular. Magazines available at a newsstand are generally popular too.

Another way to tell if a source is a scholarly journal or a popular magazine is by looking at the magazine itself. The content of an article is also indicative of the type of magazine it is. Some examples are:

SCHOLARLY JOURNAL:

Illustrations, if any, are graphs and charts with few glossy color pictures.

Advertisements are limited and cover academic services or scientific products.

Articles are lengthy and ALWAYS have references or a bibliography.

The author is listed and is usually identified as a researcher in the field and is affiliated with a university or research center.

The article discusses original research or experimentation.

The author writes in the language of the discipline, which readers are assumed to have some knowledge of the field so terms and basic topics are not explained.

Often, but not always, the journal is published by a scholarly professional organization.

The title of the article reflects the contents of the article.

There is an abstract at the beginning of the article.

POPULAR MAGAZINE:

Illustrations are frequent and are often glossy, color photographs.

Advertisements are common and are for consumer products and services aimed at the public.

Articles are written by a staff writer or a free lance writer.

The article covers a news or general interest story on a current topic.

The author writes in simple language that is aimed at the general reader.

Sources are rarely cited and a bibliography is not included.

Generally, popular magazines are published by a commercial business enterprise.

Scholarly and popular magazines are not the only types available either. Other types of magazines include newspapers, trade journals and opinion journals. Each type has a specific audience and use. The following chart provides examples of the various types of magazines, what audience they are aimed at and their uses.

TYPE

NEWSPAPERS

*New York Times, Wall Street Journal,
The Detroit News*

MAGAZINES

*Personal Computing, Sports Illustrated,
Parents*

NEWS MAGAZINES

*Time, Newsweek,
U.S. News & World Report*

OPINION JOURNALS

*National Review, Christianity Today,
New Republic*

PROFESSIONAL TRADE JOURNALS

*Advertising Age, Library Journal,
Modern Plastics*

ACADEMIC (Scholarly) JOURNALS

*Journal of Social Psychology, Journal of
Applied Physiology, New England Journal of
Medicine*

AUDIENCE & USE

· Current information

· News stories, features

· Opinion and commentary

· Minimal reading level

· Tips, how to, recipes...

· Targeted to specific consumer groups

· Nontechnical language

· Current events overviews

· Book, movie reviews

· Educated audience

· Particular viewpoint

· Commentary on politics and society

· Written for professionals in the field

· Current trends and practices

· Meetings, jobs, personalities

· Technical language

· Reports of original research

*· Research methods and results, discussion and
extensive citations*

DON'T GO AWAY EMPTY HANDED!!! *If you are having trouble locating what you need, just ask for a reference librarian. We are here to help!*

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