

Distinguishing Scholarly Journals from Other Periodical Sources

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the difference between scholarly journals and other source material. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Scholarly Journals

Scholarly journals are the type of periodicals you should use as source material in your academic research essay. It's thus important to differentiate these journals from other types of periodicals that are less suited for academic research.

The main purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experimentation in order to make such information available to the rest of the scholarly world.

Most scholarly journals are peer-reviewed. When an article is submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, the editors send it out to other scholars in the same field (the author's peers) to get their opinion on the quality of the scholarship, its relevance to the field, its appropriateness for the journal, etc.

Publications that don't use peer review just rely on the judgement of the editors as to whether an article is up to snuff or not. That's why you can't count on them for solid, scientific scholarship.

You can identify scholarly journals in the following ways.

1. **Abstracts:** Scholarly journal articles often have an abstract, or a descriptive summary of the article contents, before the main text of the article.
2. **Visual layout:** Scholarly journals have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or exciting pictures.
3. **Citations:** Scholarly journals always cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies. These bibliographies are generally lengthy and cite other scholarly writings.
4. **Authors:** Articles are written by a scholar in the field or by someone who has done research in the field.

Some examples of scholarly journals include:

- *American Economic Review*
- *Applied Geography*

- *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*
- *Journal of Theoretical Biology*
- *Modern Fiction Studies*

2. Substantive News/General Interest Periodicals

The main purpose of periodicals in this category is to provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens. While these can be useful for gaining background information on a topic, they are not as useful for substantial research.

They are generally published by commercial enterprises or individuals, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.

You can identify substantive news/general interest periodicals in the following ways.

1. Language: The language of these publications is geared toward any educated audience. There is no specialty assumed—only interest and a certain level of intelligence.
2. Visual layout: These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format. Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.
3. Citations: News and general interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often do not.
4. Authors: Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar, or a freelance writer.

Some examples of substantive news/general interest publications include:

- *The Economist*
- *National Geographic*
- *New York Times*
- *Scientific American*
- *Vital Speeches of the Day*

3. Popular Periodicals

The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers'), or to promote a viewpoint. Therefore, these periodicals are not suitable sources for academic research.

You can identify popular periodicals in the following ways.

1. Language: Articles are usually very short and written in simple language.
2. Visual layout: Popular periodicals are often slick and attractive in appearance with lots of colorful graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.).
3. Citations: These publications do not cite sources in a bibliography. Information published in popular periodicals is often second or third-hand, and the original source is rarely mentioned.

Some examples of popular publications include:

- *People*

- *Ebony*
- *Parents*
- *Sports Illustrated*
- *Vogue*

4. Sensational Periodicals

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. Clearly, you will not want to use these periodicals for your research.

You can identify sensational periodicals in the following ways.

1. Language: The language is elementary and occasionally inflammatory or sensational.
2. Visual layout: Sensational periodicals come in a variety of styles but often use a newspaper format.

Some examples of sensational periodicals include:

- *Globe*
- *National Examiner*
- *Star*
- *Weekly World News*



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about how **scholarly journals** are different from other types of periodical sources, such as **substantive news/general interest periodicals**, **popular periodicals**, and **sensational periodicals**. For an academic research paper, your periodical sources should be scholarly, peer-reviewed journals to ensure you are getting articles that represent the best scholarship currently available.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Distinguishing Scholarly Journals from Other Periodicals" and "Peer Reviewed Journals" tutorials.