Recognizing Peer-Reviewed Literature & Scholarly Journals

Scholarly v. Non-Scholarly Articles

Generally:

- Scholarly articles are published in journals.
- Non-scholarly articles are published in popular periodicals, such as magazines and newspapers.
- Non-scholarly articles are also published in trade journals and professional bulletins.
- Articles in scholarly journals are peer-reviewed (refereed).

That means that they have been “evaluated by a group of experts in the appropriate field.”

Not all content in scholarly journals is peer reviewed.

The following kind of content is NOT peer reviewed:

- Editorials
- Book reviews
- Letters to the editors
- Comments
- Brief Notes

Characteristics of Peer-Reviewed, Scholarly Journals

- Articles are written for academics, researchers, and/or professionals working in a particular discipline (i.e., chemistry, medicine, law, economics, etc.).
- Articles are written by specialists in a particular discipline.
- Articles contain terminology specific to the discipline.
Articles cite information sources and contain a reference list (bibliography) providing identification details about the cited sources.

Articles include an abstract (overview) of the article’s purpose, content, and conclusions.

Articles list the names of all contributing authors.

Articles contain an address for corresponding with one of the lead authors.

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Articles may contain charts, tables, formulas, equations, and outlines, a list of keywords, and a statement of competing interests.

Articles include the authors’ institutional affiliation.

As applicable, articles will include their received, resubmitted and accepted dates.
Articles are written for educational or research value, but not for entertainment value.

Articles are indexed in discipline-related databases (i.e., Medline, Embase, Agricola, Eric, PsychINFO, Toxline, etc.).

Journals can be funded by subscriptions, association dues, university faculty departments, and sometimes by donations.

Most journals are sold only by subscription.

For research articles, authors will list any research grants and other funding which helped finance the research on which the article reports.

Authors are not paid for the publication of their articles.
Characteristics of Popular Periodicals

- May be aimed at a particular segment of the public (i.e., women, men, teenagers, hobbyists, motorcycle enthusiasts, sports fans, etc.).
- Articles are written at a reading level that the general public can understand.
- Articles are usually written by paid staff members or freelance authors, who are not necessarily experts about their articles’ subjects.
- Articles are generally written by one person only.
- Articles sometimes do not include the name of the author(s).
- Articles do not contain abstracts.
- Articles often have eye-catching illustrations and/or photos.
- Articles are not peer-reviewed.
- Articles do not contain citations and references.
- Articles may be written for entertainment value.
- Articles are generally much shorter than peer-reviewed articles.
- Popular periodicals contain advertising.
- The funding of popular periodicals is derived from sales of advertising space, subscription, and retail outlet sales.

**Characteristics of Trade Journals**

- Written by and for people working in a particular industry (i.e., tourism, food and beverage, advertising, farming etc.)
- Include industry-related advertising.
- Articles will include industry-related terminology.
- Articles may or may not include the name of the author(s).
Articles have eye-catching illustrations and/or photos.

Why References in Scholarly Literature?

- The authors of scholarly articles provide references (citations) for their information sources.
- The references provide a means for verifying that the sources were accurately quoted or paraphrased and that they really were the source of the cited information.
- The details provided in the references listed in scholarly articles assists the reader in locating the source of information for him or herself.
- The authors of popular periodical articles are not required to cite their sources.
- If they do cite sources, they usually do so in a very general way.
Because the references to them are often so limited and vague, cited sources in popular periodicals are often difficult or impossible for the reader to locate.