

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.”

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., 2007. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 914.

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The following kind of content is NOT peer reviewed: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 an 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 contain an address for corresponding with one of the lead authors.
- 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 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.