

Popular vs. Scholarly Journals

College instructors usually require students to use scholarly journals when writing research papers. This is especially true for upper level courses and is essential in graduate work. This handout describes scholarly journal characteristics to help you distinguish scholarly journals (also referred to as *academic journals*, *peer-reviewed* or *refereed*) from other types of magazines. If you are not sure if a magazine is a scholarly journal, or you think it is but it doesn't meet the criteria below, ask your course instructor or a librarian at the Reference Desk for help.



Advantages of Periodicals

Periodicals are valuable sources of scholarly research.

- Periodicals can often provide the most **up-to-date information** in the library.
- Periodicals are good **sources of ideas** for papers or presentations.
- Periodicals are often the **first time an idea is presented in print**. Sometimes it can take years until a theory or concept is printed in a book.
- Periodicals are good **sources for differing viewpoints** on a controversial subject.
- Periodicals are usually **shorter and easier to understand** than a book.

Formats

Ritter Library currently subscribes to over **900 different periodicals** in print and microfilm. In addition, Ritter Library has access to over **20,000 full text journals** through its database subscriptions! These subscriptions encompass newspapers, magazines, newsletters and journals. Also, some of these publications are on microfilm and microfiche. A librarian can assist you with accessing any of these subscriptions.

Scholarly Journals

Scholarly journals are concerned with academic study, especially research, and are published for a specific audience of readers. Scholarly journals assume some scholarly background by the reader and generally do not give definitions. 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 or academic world. Many scholarly journals are **refereed**. A referred scholarly journal accepts only articles that have been read and approved by a panel of experts in the field (or referees).

Characteristics of Scholarly Journals

- Scholarly journals generally have a serious “look”. Often such journals contain graphs and charts, but not typically glossy pages or color photographs.
- Scholarly journal articles always list their information sources in the form of footnotes, endnotes, or bibliographies.

- Authors of scholarly journal articles are usually experts or scholars in their fields. The author's credentials are usually listed.
- Research articles written for such journals are heavily reviewed by peer experts within the discipline and revised by the author(s) before being accepted for publication.
- The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some degree of subject knowledge on the part of the reader.
- The main purpose of a scholarly journal is to report original research or experimentation in order to make such information available to the rest of the scholarly world. Articles tend to be lengthy and very thoroughly address the topic at hand.
- Most scholarly journals are published by professional organizations.
- Advertisements are rare. If there are any advertisements, they are not aimed at consumers, but at persons within that specific discipline.

Example Titles:

JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association
Reading Research Quarterly
Journal of Adolescent Research
Journal of Educational Psychology

Periodicals that are NOT Scholarly Journals

- **News magazines** such as: *Time, Newsweek, Economist* and *U.S. News & World Report*. These magazines are written for the general public. They do not require subject familiarity or advanced reading and comprehension levels. Glossy pages, mass consumer advertisements, and photos are prevalent.
- **Opinion magazines** such as: *New Republic, National Review, Nation*. These magazines are aimed at an educated audience, but without assuming any particular scholarly/professional background. Opinion magazines comment on current events and offer a particular viewpoint on world affairs, politics, and cultural matters. Glossy pages, mass consumer advertisements, and photos are prevalent.
- **Popular magazines** such as: *People, Sports Illustrated, Esquire, Popular Science, Glamour*, etc. Most academic libraries do not subscribe to many popular magazines. Instead, you will find a wider variety of popular magazines at public libraries and news stands. No advanced reading and comprehension levels are required to enjoy these magazines that are written for the 'average' consumer. Glossy pages, mass consumer advertisements, and photos are prevalent.
- **Trade/professional journals** such as: *Principal, Physics Teacher, American Libraries*, or *Track and Field Coaches Review*. These magazines are industry/career specific and designed to keep the practitioner updated on topics and trends in that specific area. Glossy pages, trade specific advertisement, and photos are prevalent.
- **Newspapers** such as: *Wall Street Journal, Plain Dealer, USA Today, New York Times*, etc. Like news magazines, newspapers also are written for the general public, contain mass consumer ads, and numerous photos.