

Scholarly Journals vs. Popular Magazines

What's the Difference?

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Hopefully this guide will help you determine what are the best resources (print and online) for your research projects. Arguments made in your paper to support your paper's thesis are more acceptable to your professors if they are based on well-informed resources from subject experts as opposed to using articles based on unsubstantiated opinion. Make a practice to research in the proper scholarly resources. This will support you in your future career as well as now!

Popular publications are normally referred to as *magazines* or *periodicals*.

- Found in newsstands, supermarkets, and general bookstores
- May be read for entertainment, opinion, current events, or special interests
- Paper is glossy, containing many colorful illustrations and advertisements
- Headlines and captions are written using sensationalist writing and words to capture attention.
- Likely to be found in a library reading room or the doctor's waiting room.
- Articles are frequently anonymous and references are not listed for source material, although material is summarized from other sources and reports.
- Frequently published weekly or monthly, some come out daily (*USA Today*)
- Indexed in publications like *Reader's Guide Abstracts*

Scholarly Publications normally are called *journals* and are preferred for papers

- These publications usually have an editorial board to accept articles
- Articles contain an abstract or summary at the beginning of the article, footnotes or endnotes, and references following the text.
- Authorship is listed and frequently provides a short summary of credentials.
- Generally contain reports on primary research
- Usually found in college and university libraries as it is expected the students and faculty will find these more useful in research than the popular material.
- Refereed or peer-reviewed journals are the most scholarly in that the articles submitted have undergone a process of review by subject experts prior to acceptance.
- Indexed in subject-specific online indexes such as *PsycInfo* or *Academic Search Premier*

Trade Publications are provided to those who pay a membership or subscription fee to an organization or work in a specific industry.

- Content is for special interests, frequently commercial or for-profit
- Circulation limited to members of the publishing association (targeted market)
- Content is frequently about people or events in the association or industry

****Newspapers* are a special category of popular publication as they inform on current events with less sensationalism.

E-journals, a growing publication medium, may fall into any of these categories. Use the guidelines given in this handout to help you decide, but consultation with your instructor is strongly advised. Some publications may look 'good' but be published by **uncreditable** persons or organizations.

Resources to help you determine what category a publication falls in as well as well as contact information for getting reprints or authorization for use:

- Subject-specific online indexes such as *ERIC* (education), *Business Source Premier* (business), and *PsycInfo* (psychology)
- Databases can give you an idea as to publication category by the general tone of the titles indexed

Characteristic	Scholarly	Popular	Trade/Special Interest
Author	Experts in field, Ph.D.s, etc, several authors—credentials are given	Staff or freelance writers, frequently 'anonymous'	Experts, practitioners in the field
Format	Abstracts, footnotes and bibliography. May have charts or graphs	Text with photographs, sometimes simple graphs	Text with photographs, graphs, charts
Topic	Narrow specific focus, original research report	Inform on broad topics, entertainment	Specific and of interest to subscribers
Illustrations	Few, mostly charts & graphs	Many, bright, eye-catching	Charts, graphs, illustrations to make point
Length	Lengthy (6+ pages)	Short (1-3 pages)	Varies with publication
Language	Jargon, formalized	Conversational, written for high-school graduate	Jargon, technical terminology
Advertising	None or little	Lots, up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of publication	Lots, specific interest to the trade
Publisher	University or academic press	Commercial publisher, may do a variety of titles	Association or trade group
Sources	Cited in notes and references or bibliography	Few, if any, citations as to sources or qualifications	An option dependent upon publication policy
Peer Reviewed or Editorial Board	Yes	No, but corrections and rebuttals may be printed in 'letters to editor'	No, but corrections and rebuttals may be printed in 'letters to editor'
Purpose and Content	Report on original and continued research	Entertainment, news, & overviews	Inform the membership of trade events, inventions, and issues
Frequency	Quarterly (usually)	Weekly or monthly	Weekly or monthly
Where found	University, College	Bookstores, newsstands	Subscription to trade or association members