

Is it Scholarly or Popular?

It can be challenging to determine if an article is scholarly or popular. Scholarly materials are those that have been **peer reviewed** or **refereed** meaning that an article has been evaluated by other experts in that fields of research to ensure that the research is of high quality.

This chart is designed to help you evaluate the articles you find and plan to use. Remember that this is a guideline and not every article will necessarily match every single criterion. Though you will often be asked to include scholarly materials in your own assignments, some popular materials can also be well-written and informative. Determine the parameters of your assignment and also evaluate your resources. If you are still unsure whether the article you wish to use is scholarly or not, try using *Ulrich's Periodical Directory*. Instructions are given below.


	SCHOLARLY		POPULAR		
			Substantive/General Interest	Trade/Professional	Sensational
Length	Tend to be lengthy e.g. 8 pages or more, in-depth articles		Often moderate to short articles in length	Often moderate to short articles in length	Tend to be short articles
Content	Tend to report on original research or experimentation, have a narrow focus Format: title, abstract, literature review, methodology, discussion, conclusion, bibliography		Often more broadly painted topics of cultural, literary or political matters, more detailed and informative than other 'popular' press pieces	Information on news, trends, developments and products in an industry or profession, practical aspects of a field	Celebrity gossip, unusual news stories that may lack credibility
Readership/Audience	For specialist readers e.g. academics, students, professionals		For an educated audience but non-specialists	For professionals and experts in the field, but may still be informative for those not in the field	For an somewhat gullible audience, lowest common denominator, appeal to superstitions and prejudices
Author	By specialists and researchers in a subject area		Staff or freelance writers who may have subject expertise	Often written by professionals in the field, may be staff or contributing authors	Author not necessarily identified

Vocabulary	Uses technical, specialized vocabulary and jargon		Avoids specialized vocabulary, may range from fairly formal to more conversational	May include some specialized vocabulary but fairly readable	Often elementary and inflammatory, popular language
Accountability	Peer reviewed/referred With significant bibliographies Well-documented and evaluated		Edited and approved for publication in-house (not peer-reviewed) Sources may be cited, may have short bibliographies	Edited and approved for publication in-house (not peer-reviewed) Sources may be cited, may have short bibliographies	Edited and approved for publication in-house (not peer-reviewed) Entirely unsubstantiated
Advertisements	Few or none		Moderate	Moderate (tend to be trade related)	Many
Appearance	Plain, tend to have black/white graphics, may have charts and figures Page numbers may continue from issue to issue		Print versions tend to be glossy and in color with photographs and illustrations	Color illustrations, each issue begins with page 1	Designed to attract customers, often in newspaper format, but in color with many photographs, each issue begins with page 1
Examples	<i>Modern Fiction Studies</i> <i>JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association</i> <i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i>		<i>The Economist</i> <i>New York Times</i> <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> <i>Sports Illustrated</i> <i>Time</i> <i>Vogue</i>	<i>Advertising Age</i> <i>American Teacher</i> <i>Publishers Weekly</i> <i>Supermarket News</i>	<i>National Examiner</i> <i>Star</i> <i>Weekly World News</i>

- This chart has been adapted from UC Santa Cruz's web page "Distinguish Between Popular and Scholarly Periodicals".

Still not sure? What else can help you determine whether an article is scholarly or not?

Here are a couple other options for determine whether an article is scholarly or not.

1. Visit *Ulrich's Periodical Directory* found in the A-Z Database list. Type in the title of the journal or magazine and look for a refereed icon .
2. If the title is not found in *Ulrich's*, consider looking up the journal on the web. Look at the journal's web site for guidelines for article submission.

Remember that looking at the content, format and documentation of the article will often tell you whether it is peer reviewed or not.