

SCHOLARLY VERSUS POPULAR FAQ

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WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Scholarly journals are written to share the results of original inquiry or research with other academics in the field. Popular magazines are written to inform and entertain the general public and/or to sell products.

WHY DO I NEED TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

Check with your instructor to find out if using popular articles is allowed for your assignment. Your instructors may require that the articles you use for your assignments are scholarly or peer-reviewed.

HOW CAN I TELL IF AN ARTICLE IS SCHOLARLY OR POPULAR?

1. Look at the chart on the reverse for clues on differentiating the article type. Some resources may be easier to classify than others but these clues will help you make a decision.
2. Limit your search to scholarly or peer-review articles in the databases. This needs to be done with caution because not all articles in a scholarly publication will be scholarly (e.g. an opinion piece is generally not considered scholarly, even if it's from a scholarly journal). See reverse for a list of some of the databases at BCIT that will allow you to limit – generally through a tick box on the search page or results page.
3. [Ask a librarian](#) for help. You can visit the reference desk at the library, call us at 604.432.8371, chat online with librarians through [AskAway](#) or email us at ibrarian@bcit.ca.

WHAT DOES PEER-REVIEWED MEAN? HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMETHING IS PEER-REVIEWED?

A peer-reviewed journal means that before articles are published, they are reviewed by experts in the field. The experts may suggest revisions before the article is published. To find out if an article is peer-reviewed, you can go to the website of the journal it was published in to check if the journal is peer-reviewed (or refereed), or check the front pages of a print journal to see if there is an editorial board.

HOW DO TRADE JOURNALS FIT IN?

Trade magazines have “insider” information, and are aimed at people within a specific industry. Articles in trade magazines often fall between scholarly and popular. For example, they may list one or two references, but generally do not have a substantial bibliography. They tend to have ads, but less than in a popular publication, and the ads are industry-related.

For some assignments, instructors may want you to limit your use of trade articles, or to back up the information found in the trade journal with information from a scholarly resource. For other assignments, such as presentations on new products or technologies, trade articles may be necessary.

SCHOLARLY, TRADE AND POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

CLUES TO LOOK AT	SCHOLARLY	TRADE	POPULAR
Authors	Academics or experts in the field, with credentials and affiliations clearly listed	Practitioners or educators in the field	Paid journalists
Language	Technical or scholarly, often requires knowledge of discipline and jargon to fully understand	Has industry jargon, assumes a background in the field	Easy to read
Look	Usually black and white, sometimes charts or drawings but little colour or pictures	Glossy paper, with colourful pictures and industry-related advertisements	Glossy, colourful, full of pictures and advertisements
Abstracts (very short summary of the article)	Generally present	Generally absent	Absent
Reference List	Bibliographies or footnotes present, and generally substantial	Short bibliographies may be present	Absent
Intended audience	Academics	Other practitioners in the field	General public
Article length	Long articles, often split into sections like abstract, introduction, methods, discussion	Varies	Shorter articles

BCIT DATABASES THAT ALLOW LIMITING TO SCHOLARLY OR PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

For both EBSCOhost databases and Wilson Web databases, more information on the peer-review policy can be found at ebSCOhost.com/academic/about-peer-review-policy.

- > EBSCOhost databases including Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, MedLine, Business Source Complete, Food Science and Technology Abstracts, GreenFile and PsycInfo
- > Wilson Web databases including Art Index, Humanities Index and Social Sciences Index
- > ProQuest databases including CBCA