Journals and magazines are important sources for up-to-date information in all disciplines, but it is often difficult to distinguish between the various levels of scholarship available in them. In this study guide the criteria for periodical literature is divided into four categories:

- Scholarly
- Substantive News or General Interest
- Popular
- Sensational

Webster's Third International Dictionary defines **scholarly** as: 1) concerned with academic study, especially research or 2) exhibiting the methods and attitudes of a scholar. **Substantive** is defined as ‘having a solid base, being substantial.’ **Popular** means ‘fit for, or reflecting the taste and intelligence of the people at large.’ **Sensational** is defined a ‘arousing or intending to arouse strong curiosity, interest or reaction.’ Keeping these definitions in mind, and realizing that none of the lines drawn between types of journals can ever be totally clear cut, we can say that in general the criteria are as follows.

**SCHOLARLY**

- Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or exciting pictures.
- Scholarly journals **always** cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies.
- Articles are written by a professional or by someone who has done research in a particular field of study.
- The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some scholarly background on the part of the reader.
- 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 world.
- Many scholarly journals, but not all, are published by a specific professional organization.

**Examples**

*Psychological Bulletin*
*Journal of Marriage and the Family*
*JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*
*English Historical Review*
SUBSTANTIVE NEWS, OPINION, OR TRADE MAGAZINE

♦ These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format.
♦ Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.
♦ News and opinion & interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often they do not.
♦ Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar or a free lance writer.
♦ The language of these publications is geared to any educated audience. There is no specialty assumed, only interest and a certain level of intelligence.
♦ They are generally published by commercial enterprises, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.
♦ The main purpose of periodicals in this category is to provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens and are intended for the educated reader, but not necessarily the scholar;
♦ Trade magazines are written by practitioners for peers working in the same industry or profession;
♦ Trade magazines will include graphics and related product advertising;
♦ Trade magazines are useful for profession or industry news, related government regulations, market data, product development information, employment opportunities, and calendars of related events.
♦ Opinion magazines contain opinions or viewpoints on cultural or political affairs, often with particular bias;
♦ Opinion magazines are useful for comparing points of view.
♦ All are somewhere between popular and scholarly periodicals;

Examples

Economist
New York Times Magazine
Newsweek
Psychology Today
Beverage World
New Republic
Christianity Today

POPULAR

♦ Popular periodicals come in many formats, although often somewhat slick and attractive in appearance. They contain many graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.).
♦ These publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information published in such journals is often second or third hand and the original source is sometimes obscure.
♦ Articles are usually very short, written in simple language and are designed to meet a minimal education level. There is generally little depth to the content of these articles.
♦ Articles are written by staff members or free lance writers.
♦ The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers), and/or promote a viewpoint.

**Examples**

*Family Circle*
*Sports Illustrated*
*Parents*
*People Weekly*
*Reader's Digest*

**SENSATIONAL**

♦ Sensational periodicals come in a variety of styles, but often use a newspaper format.
♦ Their language is elementary and occasionally inflammatory or sensational. They assume a certain gullibility in their audience.
♦ The main purpose of sensational magazines seems to be to arouse curiosity and to cater to popular superstitions. They often do so with flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g. "Boy Born with Two Heads and Fully Grown").

**Examples**

*Globe*
*National Examiner*
*Star*
*Weekly World News*

There are reference books which attempt to describe and evaluate periodical titles. If you need further information about an individual title we suggest you consult:

K3m

"...an annotated listing by subject of some 6,500 periodicals." (from Preface) Each entry gives name of periodical, beginning publication date, publisher, editor, address, price and such information as indexing, size and level of audience. Short abstracts describe the scope, political slant and other aspects of the publication. Arrangement is topical which brings magazines and journals on like subjects together. To find an individual title one uses the title index at the end of the volume.

**A Note about Peer Review**

"Peer review" refers to the policy of having experts in the field examine journal articles before acceptance for publication. Peer review insures that the research described in a journal's articles is sound and of high quality. Sometimes the term "refereed" is used instead of peer review.
CHECKLIST OF CRITERIA

Below is a checklist to determine whether an article is from a scholarly or non-scholarly periodical. This is just an evaluative measure, as many journals do not meet all the criteria in one category. For example, *Scientific American*, which has glossy pages and color pictures, contains both scholarly articles as well as those geared to a more general audience. The differences between a completely scholarly journal and a completely popular magazine should really be represented on a continuum. **Accountability and content of the specific article** are the key criteria used to determine if an article is scholarly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scholarly (peer-reviewed, or refereed)</th>
<th>News, Opinion or Trade</th>
<th>Popular</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance &amp; Content</strong></td>
<td>Has serious look, lots of text, may contain graphs and charts but few photos, plain cover, plain paper, mostly black/white graphics and illustrations, the page numbering is consecutive throughout each volume, content will be in-depth including primary accounts of original findings, very specific information</td>
<td>Cover depicts industrial setting or news item, has glossy paper, pictures and illustrations in color, each issue starts with page 1; trade magazines will have industry trends, new products or techniques, and organizational news</td>
<td>Eye-catching cover, glossy paper, pictures and illustrations in color, each issue starts with page 1, secondary discussion of other’s research, may include personal narrative or opinion, general information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advertisements</strong></td>
<td>None, or very minimal</td>
<td>Many advertisements, trade magazines will have ads that relate to the industry</td>
<td>Many many advertisements</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
<td>Academic readers with background in the field of interest</td>
<td>For trade magazines the audience is other members of a specific business, industry or organization; for opinion and news magazines, the general public is the audience</td>
<td>General public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article Length</strong></td>
<td>Longer articles, providing in-depth analysis of topics</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Shorter articles, providing broader overviews of topics</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Authorship</strong></td>
<td>Author usually an expert or specialist in the field, name and credentials always provided</td>
<td>In a trade magazine these will be an expert or practitioner in the field, names sometimes provided</td>
<td>Author usually a staff writer or a journalist, name and credentials not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language &amp; Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Written in the jargon of the field for scholarly readers (professors, researchers or students)</td>
<td>Trade magazines may include some technical language specific to that industry; news and opinion magazines use general but educated language</td>
<td>Written in non-technical language for anyone to understand, lowest reading level possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Goal is scholarly communication among experts in a field of research</td>
<td>Practical information for professionals working in an industry. Provide commentary on political or social issues, may contain speeches or interviews</td>
<td>Purpose is to entertain or to inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format/Structure</td>
<td>Articles usually more structured, may include these sections: <em>abstract, literature review, methodology, results, conclusion, bibliography</em></td>
<td>No structure to articles, evidence drawn from personal experience or common knowledge</td>
<td>Articles do not necessarily follow a specific format or structure, but will often read like a story, will not present supporting evidence or a conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors/Publishers</td>
<td>Articles usually reviewed and critically evaluated by a board of experts in the field (refereed), Published by an academic press or academic organization</td>
<td>Trade magazines will be published by a trade organization or professional association; edited by publication’s editors</td>
<td>Articles are not evaluated by experts in the field, but by editors on staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cited Sources</td>
<td>Bibliography (works cited) and/or footnotes are <em>always</em> provided to document research thoroughly</td>
<td>Occasionally brief bibliographies will appear, but they are not expected.</td>
<td>Bibliography (works cited) is usually not provided, although names of reports or references may be mentioned in the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td><em>Ethnic and Racial Studies</em>  <em>Journal of Public Health</em>  <em>Latin American Perspectives</em>  <em>Annals of Mathematics</em>  <em>Education Quarterly</em></td>
<td><em>Business Week</em>  <em>Time</em>  <em>National Review</em>  <em>Advertising Week</em>  <em>Engineering News</em></td>
<td><em>New Yorker</em>  <em>Sports Illustrated</em>  <em>People Magazine</em>  <em>Rolling Stone</em>  <em>Reader’s Digest</em></td>
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Adapted from materials at Cornell University: [http://www.library.cornell.edu/t/help/res_strategy/evaluating/scholar.html](http://www.library.cornell.edu/t/help/res_strategy/evaluating/scholar.html) and UTSA: [http://www.lib.utsa.edu/Research/Subject/scholarlyguide.html](http://www.lib.utsa.edu/Research/Subject/scholarlyguide.html) and Col St U: [http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/poplr.html](http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/poplr.html)