Distinguishing Scholarly Journals

Journals and magazines are important sources for up-to-date information in all disciplines. In this guide, periodical literature is divided into five categories:

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

Definitions

Webster’s *Third International Dictionary* defines "scholarly" as:

1. Concerned with academic study, especially research,
2. Exhibiting the methods and attitudes of a scholar, and
3. Having the manner and appearance 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 as 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, the general 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 pages.
- Scholarly journals always cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies.
- Articles are written by a scholar in the field or by someone who has done research in the field.
- 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, though by no means all, are published by a specific professional organization.

Examples of Scholarly Journals:

- American Economic Review
- Archives of Sexual Behavior
- JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association
- Journal of Marriage and the Family (published by the National Council on Family Relations)
- Modern Fiction Studies
Professional

- Professional periodicals are written to inform people who need to keep up with news, commentary and analysis in their fields.
- Professional periodicals are written to inform people with occupational interest in news, commentary, and analysis of issues in their fields.

Examples of Professional Periodicals:

- Women’s Wear Daily
- Datamation
- Science Digest
- Law and Order
- Regan Report on Nursing Law
- Artnews
- Sales and Marketing Management

Substantive News or General Interest

- These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format. Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.
- News and general interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often do not.
- Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar, or a freelance 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 or individuals, 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.

Examples of Substantive News or General Interest Periodicals:

- Christian Science Monitor
- Economist
- National Geographic
- New York Times
- Scientific American
- Vital Speeches of the Day

Popular

- Popular periodicals come in many formats. They are slick and attractive in appearance and contain many graphics, photographs, drawings, etc.
- These publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information published 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 general little depth to the content of these articles.
- The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers) and/or to promote a viewpoint.
Examples of Popular Periodicals:

- Ebony
- Parents
- People Weekly
- Readers Digest
- Sports Illustrated
- Time
- Vogue

**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. This is often accomplished using flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g., Half-Man Half-Woman Makes Self Pregnant).

Examples of Sensational Periodicals:

- Globe
- National Examiner
- Star
- Weekly World News