

Scholarly vs Popular Sources

Magazine and journal articles can usually be considered either "popular" or "scholarly".

"Popular" sources have the following characteristics:

- articles are short, written by non-scholars, and appear in popular, news-reporting magazines. These are the magazines commonly found in newstands, bookstores and supermarkets, etc. *Time*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Sports Illustrated* are examples of popular magazines.
- typically no bibliography or list of sources is included.
- articles are usually informative and up-to-date and may deal with important contemporary issues, but they are not based upon scholarly research.

"Scholarly" sources have the following characteristics:

- articles tend to be long and are written by scholars or experts on the subject whose credentials can be evaluated, and appear in scholarly journals.
- scholarly journal titles often begin or end with the words "Journal", "Review", "Bulletin", or "Research". Many of these journals are "refereed", e.g. articles are selected for publication by a panel of experts who evaluate them for accuracy and importance.
- articles may not be heavily illustrated, but tables, graphs, and diagrams are often included.
- articles are usually based on original research using established methodology which supports conclusions arrived at by the author.
- an extensive bibliography or list of references is included at the end of the articles. These allow the reader to see what sources were used by the author of the article.

Books may also be "popular" or "scholarly". When evaluating books, you may want to ask the following questions:

- Are there footnotes and/or bibliographies which list the author's sources?
- Is the author objective or is the subject receiving biased or sensational treatment?
- Is the author competent to write on the subject? The author's credentials should be clearly stated.
- Who published the book? Books published by popular presses may carry less weight than those published by scholarly or university presses.