

How to Distinguish Between Scholarly, Trade, & Popular Periodicals

U.S. Conn Library

A **periodical** is a publication that comes out *periodically*—that is, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or at some other interval. Periodicals usually contain a variety of short works (e.g., articles, reviews, columns, stories, poems, etc.) written by more than one contributor. Examples include magazines, newsletters, and journals. Periodical articles are often very current and focused. For the purpose of college-level research, periodicals are usually divided into three categories:

POPULAR

- Contain short articles written by various authors in an informal in style.
- Are often unsigned and may exclude a bibliography.
- Usually contain illustrations & advertisements and are printed on glossy paper.
- Often sold at news stores and in bookstores.
- Useful for coverage of current events and popular opinion.
- Should be used sparingly. Supplement research in them with material from trade or scholarly journals, books, or other sources of information.
- Many instructors do not allow students to use popular periodicals or will strictly limit their use.

TRADE

- Are also known as **professional, industry-specific, or special interest** periodicals.
- Disseminate news and information of interest to a specific category of business or industry.
- Are usually published by a trade association.
- Content and quality fall somewhere between popular and scholarly periodicals.
- Are short to medium in length, may or may not be signed, usually contain some advertisements or illustrations, and may or may not contain a bibliography.
- Are useful for their “insider” coverage of industry trends, practices, and opinions.
- Can be used more often than popular periodicals. Supplement research in them with material from scholarly articles, books, or other sources of information.
- Many instructors do not allow students to use trade periodicals or will strictly limit their use.

SCHOLARLY

- Are also known as **peer-reviewed** or **refereed** periodicals.
- Publish original research and commentary on current developments within a specific discipline.
- Articles are signed and often lengthy, include minimal illustrations and advertisements, and generally include a bibliography.
- Are usually *peer-reviewed*. This means that articles “must be subjected to a process of critical evaluation by one or more experts on the subject, known as referees.”
- Are useful for their original and rigorous approaches to problems by experts in a particular field.
- Can almost always be used in research. Consider supplementing such research with books or other sources of information.

Comparison Chart: Is It a Scholarly, Trade, or Popular Periodical?

Criteria	Scholarly	Trade	Popular
Authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written by researchers or scholars in the field who have academic or professional titles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be written by staff, professionals in the field, or freelancers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be written by staff, freelancers, or guest contributors
Article Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium-length to long articles (approx. 5-20+ pages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short to medium-length articles (approx. 1-20 pages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly short articles (approx. 1-10 pages)
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plain covers, plain matte paper, few illustrations, maybe some tables/figures/charts/graphs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flashy covers, glossy paper, some illustrations, some photos/cartoons/sidebars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flashy covers, glossy paper, many illustrations, photos, cartoons, sidebars
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No ads, or only a few targeted at specific services or products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many ads for products and services related to a particular profession or trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many ads for general consumer products and services
Tone/Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serious, academic, specialized jargon or terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educated, specialized jargon or terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entertaining, simple language
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholars and researchers in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners of a particular profession, trade, or industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General, non-expert readers
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform, report, or make available original research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine problems or concerns in a particular profession or industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entertain or persuade readers with general interest topics, or to sell products
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources are cited: bibliography, references, and/or footnotes used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources are usually not cited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources are rarely cited
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Journal of Environmental Health</i> <i>Canadian Medical Association Journal</i> <i>Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy</i> <i>Journal of Mechanical Engineering Science</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i> <i>Dance Magazine</i> <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i> <i>Scientific American</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Newsweek</i> <i>Time</i> <i>Cosmopolitan</i> <i>Life</i>

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