

Evaluating Your Results

When conducting library and information research, you will probably find a lot of information—perhaps lists of hundreds of publications. How can you choose the best? Here are some basic things to consider:

- **Author's qualifications** (Is s/he affiliated with a university or research organization?)
- **Publisher** (Is it a university press, for example?)
- **Publication date** (Do you require the latest information, or a classic or standard text?)
- **Length** (Is the publication too brief? Too detailed?)
- **References** (Are there any? Most good research publications list their sources.)
- **Subject/content details** (Are there any? Abstracts, subject headings, descriptors, tables of contents?)
- **Peer review** (Unlike magazines, scholarly journals use this rigorous publication process—see below.)

Also consider how the publications compare with the general body of academic literature in the subject area. It is usually best to **research broadly** to ensure you find a range of perspectives which represent academic thinking on your topic.

Along with academic books, scholarly journals are especially important information sources. Scholarly journals are not like **magazines, newspapers**, or many types of **popular websites**. Sometimes popular magazines, newspapers, and websites report on research that has been published in scholarly journals, but popular articles themselves are not normally the best sources of information since they usually have no peer-review process, and therefore provide little guarantee that their information is reliable.

How can you tell the difference between scholarly and popular sources? To begin with, scholarly journal titles often contain words such as *journal*, *bulletin*, *review*, and *quarterly*. But there are several more differences:

SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

Articles in **scholarly journals** are important sources of current expert information, since they contain the results of recent academic research. In addition, over time their publication has a cumulative effect—scholarly journals are largely responsible for building each academic discipline's body of recorded knowledge, or literature.

Scholarly journals are also called academic journals, research journals, peer-reviewed journals, refereed journals, juried journals, or simply journals. Articles in scholarly journals are usually peer-reviewed, meaning they have been evaluated and edited by the author's international, professional "peers," a group of subject experts who are usually professors or other academic researchers in the specific subject area.

CRITERIA	SCHOLARLY JOURNALS	MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, AND WEBSITES
Purpose:	report independent research findings	provide information at a profit; sell ads
Audience:	scholars, researchers, professionals	general public
Author:	from research organizations (often PhDs)	often no credentials necessary
Tone:	formal, scientific, technical	informal
Validation:	references or citations	often no references provided
Layout:	long articles, often mostly text	shorter, many illustrations
Availability:	academic libraries, internet	bookstores, newsstands, internet
Examples:	<i>Canadian Journal of Sociology</i>	<i>Maclean's</i> , NYTimes.com, Wikipedia

A third category of periodicals, called **trade journals**, are found in many subjects, especially the professions, such as nursing, criminal justice, social work, education, and business administration. Trade journals can also be called *professional journals*, *practitioner's journals*, or *trade magazines*. Trade journals are not like scholarly journals or popular magazines, but they can be viewed as falling between the two. They are intended for working professionals or managers in a particular field. Articles from trade journals tend to be easy to read, and they often point to specific research findings, but they may not be as reliable as scholarly journal articles.