

# Scholarly, Trade, or Popular?

## (A Guide to Understanding Periodicals)

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This guide will help you understand what periodicals are, what different kinds of periodicals you will encounter, and how to apply this knowledge to improve your research skills.

### Definitions

The most basic definition of a **periodical** is a publication that comes out *periodically*—that is, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or at some other interval. In addition, periodicals usually contain a variety of short works (e.g., articles, reviews, columns, stories, poems, etc.) written by more than one contributor. Examples of periodicals 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

*Definition:* Popular periodicals usually contain short articles on a variety of topics written by various authors in an informal style. Articles are sometimes unsigned and usually do not include a bibliography. Popular publications usually contain illustrations or advertisements, are usually printed on glossy paper, and are usually sold at newsstands or in bookstores.

*Use:* Popular periodicals are useful for their coverage of current events and popular opinion. Students should use them sparingly and should generally supplement research in them with material from trade or scholarly journals, books, or other sources of information. Some professors may forbid students to use popular periodicals or may limit the number of sources that may come from them.

#### • TRADE

*Definition:* Also known as professional, industry-specific, or special interest periodicals, trade periodicals are “devoted to disseminating news and information of interest to a specific category of business or industry, often published by a trade association” (Rietz). In terms of content and quality, articles in trade periodicals usually fall somewhere between popular and scholarly—short to medium-length, may or may not be signed, usually contain some advertisements or illustrations, and may or may not contain a bibliography.

*Use:* Trade journals are useful for their “insider” coverage of industry trends, practices, and opinions. Students may generally use trade journals but should often supplement research in them with material from scholarly articles, books, or other sources of information. Some professors may forbid students to use trade publications or may limit the number of sources that may come from them.

#### • SCHOLARLY

*Definition:* Also known as peer-reviewed or refereed periodicals, scholarly periodicals publish original research and commentary on current developments within a specific discipline. Articles are signed, are often lengthy, include minimal illustrations and advertisements, and almost always include a bibliography. Scholarly journals are usually **peer-reviewed**, meaning that articles “must be subjected to a process of critical evaluation by one or more experts on the subject, known as referees” (Rietz).

*Use:* Scholarly articles are useful for their original and rigorous approaches to problems by experts in a particular field. Students can almost always use scholarly articles in their research, although they may need to supplement such research with books or other sources of information.

## Conducting Research in Scholarly Journals

There is no master list of scholarly journals, nor does every journal necessarily fit neatly into one of the categories. Fortunately, however, many databases provide an effective way to ensure that your results will be from mostly scholarly journals—before submitting your search, simply check the appropriate option in the advanced search screen, which may be labeled *Peer Reviewed*, *Scholarly*, or *Refereed*:

The screenshot shows a search interface for the Hospitality & Tourism Index database. It features a search bar with 'Find:' and 'in Default Fields' options. Below the search bar, there are three 'and' dropdown menus. A 'Refine Search' button is visible. The 'Limit your results:' section is highlighted in yellow, and the 'Peer Reviewed' checkbox is circled in red.

An example from the Hospitality & Tourism Index database

The screenshot shows an 'Advanced Search' interface for the ABI Inform database. It includes search criteria fields with 'AND' dropdowns and 'Citation and article text' options. There are 'Add a row' and 'Remove a row' buttons. The 'Database' is set to 'Business - ABI/INFORM Global'. The 'Date range' is 'All dates'. The 'Limit results to' section is highlighted in yellow, and the 'Scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed' checkbox is circled in red.

An example from the ABI Inform database

For more information about using databases to find articles, see the **Finding Articles** research guide.

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

Criteria	Scholarly	Trade	Popular
Authors	• Written by researchers or scholars in the field who have academic or professional titles	• May be written by staff, professionals in the field, or freelancers	• May be written by staff, freelancers, or guest contributors
Article Length	• Medium-length to long articles (approx. 5-20+ pages)	• Short to medium-length articles (approx. 1-20 pages)	• Mostly short articles (approx. 1-10 pages)
Appearance	• Plain covers, plain matte paper, few illustrations, maybe some tables/figures/charts/graphs	• Flashy covers, glossy paper, some illustrations, some photos/cartoons/sidebars	• Flashy covers, glossy paper, many illustrations, photos, cartoons, sidebars
Advertising	• No ads, or only a few targeted at specific services or products	• Many ads for products and services related to a particular profession or trade	• Many ads for general consumer products and services
Tone/Language	• Serious, academic, specialized jargon or terminology	• Educated, specialized jargon or terminology	• Entertaining, simple language
Audience	• Scholars and researchers in the field	• Practitioners of a particular profession, trade, or industry	• General, non-expert readers
Purpose	• Inform, report, or make available original research	• Examine problems or concerns in a particular profession or industry	• Entertain or persuade readers with general interest topics, or to sell products
References	• Sources are cited: bibliography, references, and/or footnotes used	• Sources are usually not cited	• Sources are rarely cited
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i></li> <li>• <i>Cornell Hotel &amp; Restaurant Administration Quarterly</i></li> <li>• <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i></li> <li>• <i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i></li> <li>• <i>Tourism Analysis</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Amusement Business</i></li> <li>• <i>Foodservice Equipment and Supplies</i></li> <li>• <i>Meeting News</i></li> <li>• <i>Restaurant Business</i></li> <li>• <i>Tradeshaw Week</i></li> <li>• <i>Travel Weekly</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Business Week</i></li> <li>• <i>Money</i></li> <li>• <i>Newsweek</i></li> <li>• <i>Orlando</i></li> <li>• <i>Time</i></li> <li>• <i>Travel and Leisure</i></li> </ul>

\* Sources used in compiling the information in this research guide include: Joan M. Rietz, *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, available at <http://lu.com/odlis/> (last accessed 2 May 2006); and Joanna M. Burkhardt, Mary C. MacDonald, & Andrée J. Rathemacher, *Teaching Information Literacy* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2003).