Academic Journals vs. Popular Magazines

It is often difficult to determine the difference between the two levels of periodicals – scholarly/academic and popular. This guide's purpose is to provide criteria to recognize the different levels.

Webster's Third New 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. **Popular** means "adapted to the understanding and tastes of the majority." Keeping these definitions in mind, and realizing that the lines are not clear cut, the general criteria are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC JOURNALS</th>
<th>MAGAZINES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. generally have a sober, serious look / often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or pictures</td>
<td>1. come in many formats, often slick and attractive / many graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.)</td>
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<td>2. few, if any, ads; generally ads would be related to subject i.e. books/journals, conferences, equipment used in field, etc.</td>
<td>2. many advertisements marketing a variety of consumer products and services</td>
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<td>3. always cite sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies</td>
<td>3. rarely, if ever, cite resources. Information often second or third hand and original source often not mentioned</td>
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<td>4. written by a scholar in the discipline or by someone who has done research in the field</td>
<td>4. articles written by staff or freelance writers or journalists</td>
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<td>5. language is that of the discipline covered / assumes some scholarly background of the reader</td>
<td>5. articles are usually written in non-technical language and designed to be understood by a wider audience who have no background on subject/ usually little depth to the content of articles</td>
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<td>6. purpose is to report on original research in order to make the information available to the rest of the scholarly world</td>
<td>6. purpose is to entertain, promote a viewpoint, or sell a product</td>
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<td>7. article usually more structured, may include these sections: abstract, literature review, methodology, results, conclusion, bibliography/references</td>
<td>7. articles do not necessarily follow a specific format or structure</td>
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<td>8. most are published by professional organizations or university presses</td>
<td>8. published by commercial or independent publishers</td>
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**EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS**
- JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association
- Journal of Marriage and the Family
- Studies in Short Fiction

**EXAMPLES OF MAGAZINES**
- Newsweek
- Psychology Today
- Glamour

Explanation based on Cornell University Library "Skill Guide No. 20"
Peer Review

"Peer review" refers to the policy of having experts in the field examine journal articles before acceptance for publication. Peer review insures that the research described in a journal's articles is sound and of high quality. Sometimes the term "refereed" is used instead of peer review.

Examine the editorial policy, instructions to authors, and/or the editorial board list of members to determine if the editorial boards and/or consultants are experts in the field. Sometimes this information can be found on the journal's own Web site.

No matter what type of journal an article comes from, be sure to evaluate on it based on standard criteria.

Other Periodical Types

MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS THAT ARE NOT SCHOLARLY:

NEWS MAGAZINES like Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report. These periodicals provide reputable reporting on current topics and are good sources for introductions to those topics, but they don't provide the same analysis as scholarly journals. Articles are not usually written by scholars in the field and are aimed at a more general audience than are articles in scholarly journals.

OPINION MAGAZINES such as New Republic, National Review, Atlantic, and Nation. These magazines are aimed at an educated audience, without assuming particular scholarly background. They comment on current events and offer a particular viewpoint on world affairs, politics, and cultural matters.

POPULAR MAGAZINES like Health, Sports Illustrated, Jet, People, Redbook, or Reader's Digest. Most academic libraries don't carry as many of these magazines as public libraries do. Popular magazines are attractive and entertaining, but do not report on original research or cite sources, and are not the kind of sources to cite in the bibliography of an academic paper.

TRADE JOURNALS such as Beverage World, Journal of Risk and Insurance, Automotive News, and Progressive Grocer. These magazines are industry specific, designed to update and inform the reader on current trends in the industry.

Information from:

Western Carolina University Hunter Library - What Is A Scholarly Journal?
http://www.wcu.edu/1756.asp

Colorado State University Libraries - Popular Magazines VS Trade Magazines VS Scholarly Journals
http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/poplr.html

Diablo Valley College - Scholarly Journal v. Popular Magazine Articles
http://www.dvc.edu/library/libweb/journalmags.htm