**What is a Scholarly Article?**  
David L. Rice Library

Many instructors at the college level require that you use scholarly articles as sources when writing a research paper. Scholarly or peer-reviewed articles are written by experts in academic or professional fields. They are excellent sources for finding out what has been studied or researched on a topic as well as to find bibliographies that point to other relevant sources of information.

**How can you determine if your article is scholarly or popular?**

1. **Publication**
   1. *Audience*: Popular sources are written for a wide audience who will not have extensive background about any particular subject. Scholarly sources will be written for an academic audience with this subject-specific knowledge.
   2. *Subject Focus*: The content of popular sources will have a much greater variety than in a scholarly source. Scholarly sources will focus on a specific, narrow subject area, since they are published for an academic audience with this subject-specific knowledge.
   3. *Publisher*: The website of a popular source may have heavy advertising and spam. Scholarly publishers will mainly be academic institutions or organizations while popular publishers will be commercial firms.
2. **Author**
   1. *Credentials*: Popular sources tend to have authors that are staff writers or journalists who have little background in the given subject. Scholarly authors will usually have credentials such as a Masters or Ph.D. Most articles will include a short blurb including this information.
   2. *Connected Institution:* Authors of popular articles may be connected to a company or newspaper. Scholarly authors may be connected to an academic institution or an organization related to the article’s topic.
3. **Article**
   1. *Reading Level*: Since a popular publication is for a wide audience, articles will be written on a much easier reading level. Scholarly sources will be written at a higher reading level.
   2. Terminology: Popular sources will not have the technical jargon and terminology often seen in scholarly articles.
   3. *Data*: Scholarly articles may also include an extensive amount of data in the form of graphs, charts, and tables.
   4. *References*: Scholarly sources will have citations. These may be listed under references, bibliography, works cited, or they may appear as footnotes. Popular articles will rarely if ever have these citations.

**What does peer-reviewed mean?**

Peer reviewed journals require that articles are read and evaluated by experts in the field before they are accepted for publication. Although most scholarly articles are refereed or peer-reviewed, some are not.

**How can you find a scholarly article?**

Many databases allow you to limit your search to academic, scholarly, or peer reviewed journals (terminology varies between databases). Although limiting provides a preliminary filter, not all articles within a scholarly journal are scholarly (editorials, book reviews, etc), so you will need to evaluate each article individually against the criteria in the chart.

**Differences between Scholarly and Popular Sources**

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|  | Popular Sources | Scholarly Sources |
| **Authors** | Journalists, staff writers, you | Experts with advanced degrees/credentials, peer-reviewed |
| **Audience** | General Public, broad interest groups | Academics: Scholars, researchers, other experts |
| **Purpose** | Entertain, Inform, promote products or ideas | Advance of challenge knowledge of a research topic |
| **Publisher** | Any individual of organization | Colleges/Universities, specialized organizations |