IDENTIFYING AND READING SCHOLARLY WORKS

IDENTIFYING

When writing an academic paper, it is important to use the right resources at the right time. Faculty often request students find **"scholarly or academic journal articles"** and not **"popular magazine articles"** for their research sources. This is because, in general, scholarly articles are viewed as having more authority. Articles from the popular press are viewed as being less credible.

This table will help you **identify** if an article is scholarly or popular.

Characteristics	Scholarly	Popular
Content	Formal structure May include: abstract, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion	No specific format or structure
Length	Longer articles In-depth analysis of topics	Shorter articles (often "quick reads") Broader overview of topics
Sources	In-text citations, sometimes footnotes Bibliography/reference list	Rarely contain explicit citations (may link to other popular media articles) Original sources can be obscure
Review Policy	Peer review: articles read and reviewed by peers for accuracy	Articles may go through an editor or editorial board
Author	Professional, specialist Noted expert in the field	Journalist, staff writer, guest contributor or anonymous
Audience	Researchers and professionals Advanced reading level Specialized vocabulary	General public Basic reading level Little or no specialized language – accessible, common vocabulary
Advertising	Very little or highly specialized	Significant amount
Examples	Journal of Politics & Society Philosophical Quarterly Journal of British Studies Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice	Time MacLeans People Vanity Fair Wired

Keep in mind that some research topics will invite the use of popular press articles. Contemporary topics that have not yet been extensively covered by the academic community may require you to look beyond traditional scholarly literature for information**.** Or, if you are examining public opinion on an issue, popular sources might be vital to your research. If you are unsure about the credibility or appropriateness of a source, always check with your instructor.

NAVIGATING

Many scholarly journal articles follow a similar structure, outlined and described below. The exception to this structure is articles from Humanities disciplines, which may not follow the same path and are not usually broken into the same kinds of sections.

Learn how to **navigate** a scholarly article by reading more about the different article sections.

Title

The title of the article, which is usually descriptive, will give you a brief preview of the article contents.

Abstract

A summary of the article, highlighting the most important points. If the title is a brief preview, the abstract is like an extended movie trailer (but it includes the spoilers!). Always read the title and abstract first to make sure the article is relevant to your research and worth reading further.

Introduction

Introduces the topic of the article. The introduction will often provide important context and background for the topic, reveal the author's (or authors') motivations for completing the research, and give you a taste of the main thrust of the argument.

Literature Review

A review of other scholarly literature (such as articles and books) about the article's topic. The literature review helps to position the article in the context of existing scholarship, showing what has already been written and how the article relates to other work.

The literature review often introduces key terms relevant to the topic.

Keep in mind that literature reviews are not always explicitly labelled as such. When in doubt, look for the section following the introduction that mentions other authors and scholarship.

Methodology (or Methods)

Describes the methods used to conduct the research. Common methods include: interviews, surveys, narrative analysis, and case studies.

Results

Describes the findings of the research. What did the author(s) discover?

Discussion

Sheds light on the significance of the findings. Why do the author's (or authors') discoveries matter?

Conclusion

Concludes the article by summing up the article's key points and posing new questions raised by the research.

Bibliography (or Reference List)

The list of sources referenced by the author. Look to this list for further reading on the article topic.

READING

Reading a scholarly article is different than reading a newspaper article or a novel. Because scholarly articles are broken into clear sections, it is more efficient to read by **selectively reading** the sections that are most important for your purposes. **This type of reading is non-linear and strategic.**

Once again, because articles from Humanities disciplines do not always follow the structure described above, you may need to read Humanities articles in a more linear fashion to ensure you fully grasp their arguments.

Step 1

Always read the abstract first. As mentioned above, the abstract is a summary of the article. Read the abstract and ensure the article is relevant to your research. If the article seems relevant, move on to step 2.

Step 2

Read the **introduction** section, the **discussion** section, and the **conclusion**. Reading these sections will reveal the most important points of the article, including the motivations for the research, the significance of the research, and any final conclusions you should take away from the research. While reading, highlight quotes that seem important or raise questions in your mind.

Step 3

Now that you know what the article is about, **quickly skim the sections you skipped before**. Take note of headings and figures that interest you and look at those sections in more depth.

Step 4

After you've skimmed, **reflect on what you've read in steps 1, 2 and 3**. Try to write an abstract for the article in your own words and jot down any thoughts you have about the research. As a starting point, consider: What are the article's key points? Why is the article important? How does it compare with other articles you've read on this (or related) topics?