Distinguishing Scholarly Journals from Other Periodicals

Journals and magazines are important sources for up-to-date information in all disciplines. With a periodical collection as large and diverse as Cornell's it is often difficult to distinguish between the various levels of scholarship found in the collection. In this guide we have divided the periodical literature into four categories:

- **Scholarly**
- **Substantive News/General Interest**
- **Popular**
- **Sensational**

DEFINITIONS:

*Webster's Third 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.

**Substantive** is defined as having a solid base, being substantial.

**Popular** means fit for, or reflecting the taste and intelligence of, the people at large.

**Sensational** is defined as arousing or intending to arouse strong curiosity, interest or reaction.

Keeping these definitions in mind, and realizing that none of the lines drawn between types of journals can ever be totally clear cut, the general criteria are as follows.
Scholarly journal articles often have an abstract, a descriptive summary of the article contents, before the main text of the article.

Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or exciting pictures.

Scholarly journals always cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies. These bibliographies are generally lengthy and cite other scholarly writings.

Articles are written by a scholar in the field or by someone who has done research in the field. The affiliations of the authors are listed, usually at the bottom of the first page or at the end of the article—universities, research institutions, think tanks, and the like.

The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some scholarly background on the part of the reader.

The main purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experimentation in order to make such information available to the rest of the scholarly world.

Many scholarly journals, though by no means all, are published by a specific professional organization.

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS:

*American Economic Review*

*Archives of Sexual Behavior*

*JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*

*Journal of Marriage and the Family*(published by the National Council on Family Relations)

*Modern Fiction Studies*

*Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*
SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST

These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format. Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.

News and general interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often do not.

Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar or a free lance writer.

The language of these publications is geared to any educated audience. There is no specialty assumed, only interest and a certain level of intelligence.

They are generally published by commercial enterprises or individuals, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.

The main purpose of periodicals in this category is to provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens.

EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST PERIODICALS:

Christian Science Monitor

Economist

National Geographic

New York Times

Scientific American

Vital Speeches of the Day

POPULAR

Popular periodicals come in many formats, although often somewhat slick and attractive in appearance. Lots of graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.).

These publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information published in such journals is often
second or third hand and the original source is sometimes obscure.

Articles are usually very short, written in simple language and are designed to meet a minimal education level. There is generally little depth to the content of these articles.

The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers), and/or to promote a viewpoint.

EXAMPLES OF POPULAR PERIODICALS:

Ebony
Parents
People Weekly
Readers Digest
Sports Illustrated
Time
Vogue

SENSATIONAL

Sensational periodicals come in a variety of styles, but often use a newspaper format.

Their language is elementary and occasionally inflammatory or sensational. They assume a certain gullibility in their audience.

The main purpose of sensational magazines seems to be to arouse curiosity and to cater to popular superstitions. They often do so with flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g. Half-man Half-woman Makes Self Pregnant).

EXAMPLES OF SENSATIONAL PERIODICALS:

Globe
National Examiner
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INDIVIDUAL PERIODICAL TITLES

There are reference books which describe and evaluate periodicals. For evaluations of specific periodicals, use:


*(Olin Ref Z 6941 .K21 +; shelved at the reference desk)*

An annotated listing by subject of over 6,000 periodicals. Each entry gives name of periodical, beginning publication date, publisher, editor, address, price and such information as indexing, size, and level of audience. Short abstracts describe the scope, political slant, and other aspects of the publication. Arrangement is topical, bringing magazines and journals on like subjects together. To find an individual title, use the title index at the end of the volume.

Or ask for assistance at the reference desk.

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