



Comparing Periodical Types:

Scholarly Journals, Popular Magazines, and Trade Publications

Scholarly journals, popular magazines, and trade publications are periodicals. Being able to distinguish among the different types of periodicals is an important skill. The chart below should help you decide what kind of periodical you are examining. Be aware though that the chart gives general characteristics. If you are wondering whether a particular publication is acceptable for an assignment, ask your instructor.

Criteria	Scholarly Journals	Popular Magazines	Trade Publications
Authors:	Scholars.	Journalists.	Practitioners.
Reviewers:	Scholars.	Editors.	Editors.
Audience:	Scholars.	Public.	Practitioners.
Sources/ Citations:	Formal. Bibliographies and/or Footnotes.	Rare. Often incomplete.	Bibliographies.
Language:	Formal. Jargon.	Semi-Formal or Informal. Simple.	Semi-Formal. Jargon.
Graphics:	Charts. Graphs.	Photographs. Illustrations. Charts. Graphs.	Charts. Graphs. Illustrations.
Advertising:	Rare. Selective.	Common.	Selective.
Examples:	<i>Behavioral Neuroscience Journal of Economics</i>	<i>Newsweek Reader's Digest</i>	<i>American Grocer Aviation Week</i>

The Scholarly Journal

A scholarly journal, sometimes called a research journal, is a periodical that contains articles written by scholars in a particular subject field. Scholars are experts and heavyweight thinkers – people like your professors in college, for example. Because these articles are written by experts for other experts to read, they tend to be fairly technical and to use specialized vocabulary. A scholar prepares an article and submits it to a journal. Other scholars then review the article and decide if it is good enough to be published in the journal. This review process is known as “peer review” because the reviewers are scholarly peers (or equals) of the authors of the articles. When it works properly, the peer review process should ensure that only high-quality articles are published in a journal.

The Popular Magazine

A popular magazine is a periodical that contains articles written by professional writers and journalists. While these writers may be intelligent, and may have some expertise on the subject they are writing about, they are not heavyweight thinkers and scholars in the way that college professors are. Because these articles are written for the average person, they are usually easier to understand than articles in scholarly journals. Before they are published, these articles are also reviewed, but not by scholars. Rather, they are reviewed by professional editors working for the magazine, who may or may not have some expertise on the subject of the article.

The Trade Publication

A trade publication is somewhere between a scholarly journal and a popular magazine. Articles in trade journals are written by and for people who do a certain job, for example, grocers, cable TV providers, coaches, or doctors. Thus, they are written by and for people who have some specialized knowledge, but who are not scholars in the way that professors are. While articles in trade journals are easier to understand than articles in scholarly journals, they are usually of interest only to people who do the job that the trade journal deals with, or to people researching that area. Like articles in popular magazines, articles in trade journals are usually reviewed by professional editors.

Making a Decision

The table on the other side summarizes the differences between a scholarly journal, a popular magazine, and a trade journal. Remember, though, that these are just guidelines, not hard-and-fast rules. There are some periodicals that do not fit easily into one of the three categories. For example, some people would call *The Economist* a scholarly journal, while others would call it a trade journal. Some people would call *Psychology Today* a trade journal, others would call it a popular magazine. The bottom line: if an assignment asks you to use articles from a particular type of periodical, and you can't tell which group a periodical you are looking at fits into, ask the instructor who gave you the assignment which group he or she would put it in.