Is It a Magazine or a Journal?
Quick Tips for Evaluating Periodicals

Use the criteria listed below to help you determine what category a periodical fits into.

Remember to look carefully at each of the listed criteria, and not base your decision on only one or two categories. As some characteristics are overlapping between types of publications, you may need to prioritize according to importance or prominence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodical Type</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals also known as Academic, Peer-Reviewed, or Refereed</th>
<th>Professional and Trade Periodicals</th>
<th>Popular &amp; Special Interest Magazines</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRITERIA</td>
<td>To inform, report, or make available original research. In-depth analysis of issues related to the discipline. Includes information on conferences.</td>
<td>Written for practitioners. Discusses current trends, news &amp; products in a specific field. Includes employment &amp; career information.</td>
<td>Designed to inform, entertain, or persuade. Short articles deal with news, current events or hot topics.</td>
<td>Quickly updated. Designed to inform, entertain, or persuade. Short articles deal with news, current events, or hot topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>Lengthy articles with abstracts, methods, results, conclusions, and bibliography. May be published quarterly.</td>
<td>Articles medium in length. May include statistics and forecasts. Often published monthly.</td>
<td>Articles usually fairly short. Published monthly or weekly.</td>
<td>Articles usually fairly short. Published daily or weekly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAT</td>
<td>Scholars, professors, or researchers in the field, discipline, or specialty.</td>
<td>May be written by staff, a scholar, professional in the field, or a free-lance writer who has subject expertise.</td>
<td>Written by publication's staff or free-lance writers.</td>
<td>May be written by publication's staff, newswires, free-lance writers, or syndicated columns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE/AUDIENCE</td>
<td>Use terminology/jargon of the discipline. Reader is assumed to have a scholarly background. Written by experts for experts.</td>
<td>Language appropriate for an educated readership and assumes a certain level of specialized knowledge.</td>
<td>Uses simple language in order to meet minimum education level. Written for a general audience.</td>
<td>Uses simple language in order to meet minimum education level. Written for a general audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAPHICS</td>
<td>Graphics and charts to illustrate articles, but seldom glossy pages, pictures, or advertisements.</td>
<td>Includes photographs, illustrations, charts and tables to enhance the publication. Sometimes glossy advertisements.</td>
<td>Photographs, illustrations, drawings, charts and many glossy advertisements.</td>
<td>Photographs, illustrations, drawings, and charts. News divided into different sections as dictated by the editors. Printed on inexpensive paper, with many advertisements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOURCES</td>
<td>Sources cited with footnotes and bibliographies.</td>
<td>Occasionally cite sources. Sources sometimes cited in the text.</td>
<td>Rarely cites any sources. Original sources can be obscure.</td>
<td>Occasionally cite sources, although many sources are interviews. Original sources can be obscure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is it a Magazine or Journal?
Figuring Periodical Types Online

When you find an article in full-text format through one of the library’s online databases, determining the periodical type of the article can be difficult because you do not have the entire periodical to look through for hints.

Looking for the following criteria can help you determine whether a periodical is a popular magazine, trade publication, or scholarly journal.

**Source title**
- Do not let the word *Journal* influence your decision too strongly. Although the word *Journal* is often an indicator of a scholarly publication, it doesn’t guarantee it. (Think in particular of *Ladies Home Journal*, a popular magazine.)
- Does the source title indicate the periodical is geared toward a very specific and limited audience? These titles are often trade publications and contain information that will assist practitioners in a given field learn more about their work. For example, *Social Studies Teacher* and *American School Board Journal* are both geared toward very specific audiences, as their titles indicate.

**Publication date** - This can provide you with a big hint.
- Scholarly publications often have a quarterly publication frequency, so those items that indicate an issue as Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall will most likely be scholarly journals.
- When the date includes a month, date, and year, it’s an indicator that the publication is probably not a scholarly journal. For example: January 23, 2010. This kind of date usually indicates a publication that is published on either a weekly or bi-weekly schedule, which is not a characteristic of scholarly journals.

**Article length** - The length can also provide you with valuable information.
- Articles in scholarly journals, particularly research articles, will often be in excess of ten pages.
- There may be articles in scholarly journals that are one to two pages, but these tend to be news releases, editorials, or book reviews. These would not be the type of article you would use in a research paper.
- Articles in trade publications have varying lengths.
- Articles in popular magazines tend to be short (under 5 pages).

**References** - Can you tell where the authors found their information?
- If there is no bibliography or reference list, it is not a scholarly article.
- If the reference list is rather short, it might be an indicator that it is a trade publication because sometimes articles in trade publications have reference lists. Ask your professor if a researched trade publication article is acceptable for your research.

**Authors**
- Are author names listed? If there is no author name it is unlikely to be a scholarly journal.
- Are there multiple authors? Often scholarly or research studies will include a group of authors.
- Are the author’s credentials included in the citation? (i.e. PhD or MD) Again, this is likely to be a scholarly or professional publication.

**Supplementary items**
- Does the database record indicate that there are supplementary items such as charts, tables or graphs included? The presence of these items will often indicate scholarly journal articles, particularly if there are multiples of such items.
- Does the record indicate there are if there are photographs included? Photographs are most frequently included in popular and trade publications.

**Still not sure?** Check to see if the library has a print subscription you can look at, examine the publication’s website for further information, or ask a librarian for assistance.

jh, 4/11