

What's the Difference?

Scholarly journals, trade publications, & general interest magazines

Scholarly journals, trade publications, and general interest magazines are important sources of information. As a student, the thesis or focus statement of your research determines the suitability of which type of source you should use.

The quality of these publications varies considerably and determining the quality of information in them is easier when you can clarify the level of scholarship and the general purpose. This chart will help you evaluate the different types of publications. Some publications may overlap across these categories.

	Scholarly Journals	Trade / Professional Publications	General Interest Magazines
Purpose	To inform, report, or make available original research or experimentation to the rest of the scholarly world.	These publications give practical information to people in an industry as well as showcase leaders in the field.	They provide information to a general, educated audience on a range of topics.
Why use them?	Often your professor will require you to use these sources. Using this type of information lends credibility to your own ideas and hypotheses.	These publications can be useful when doing an analysis of a particular industry. Additionally, they can help you when applying for a job or preparing for an interview.	Good for identifying potential topics for a research project as well as identifying current or hot issues.
Authors	Written by and for scholars or researchers in a specific subject area or discipline.	Specialists or practitioners in a particular field or industry.	Magazine's staff, an expert or scholar, or a free-lance writer.
Sources	Always cited as footnotes, endnotes or reference lists (bibliographies) at the end of an article.	Sources are often mentioned within an article but rarely are cited at the end of an article.	Occasionally cite sources, but this is the exception.
Language	Uses terminology, jargon and language of the discipline. Reader is assumed to have a similar scholarly background.	Uses jargon specific to a particular field or industry but writing is for educated professionals.	Uses language appropriate for an educated readership but doesn't emphasize any discipline's specific jargon.
Review process	Articles must go through a strict review process by peers within the discipline.	Minimal review by editorial staff and rarely by peers.	Minimal review by editorial staff.
Graphics	Contains graphs, charts, and photographs specific to the research but seldom graphic art.	Illustrations are usually charts, graphs, and photographs relevant to the article; some graphic art.	Photographs, illustrations and graphics are used to enhance the overall publication.
Publishers	Most often published by a professional organization or specialty publishing company.	Often published by professional organizations relevant to a particular field or industry.	Generally published by commercial enterprises for profit.
Advertising	Often not present or small amounts of selective advertising.	Advertising is relevant to the profession or industry.	Includes advertising which appeals to a broad readership.
Examples	<i>American Ethnologist</i> <i>Journal of Communication</i> <i>Science Magazine</i>	<i>Nation's Restaurant News</i> <i>Publisher's Weekly</i> <i>Advertising Age</i> <i>Aviation Week and Space Technology</i>	<i>Forbes</i> <i>Psychology Today</i> <i>Scientific American</i> <i>Time</i>

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Can you tell the difference?

A	<p>Harder, B. (2004, March). Worst of Two Worlds. <i>Science News</i>, 165(10), 149-150.</p> <p>Abstract (Document Summary): Mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus in North America are a blend of two strains that remain essentially distinct in the Old World, researchers report. Interbreeding may explain why the insects often bite both birds and people in North America but generally only one or the other in Europe. To understand how <i>Culex pipiens</i> populations are related, Dina M. Fonseca and her colleagues studied genetic variation in multiple populations from the United States and Europe and one population from each of Australia, Japan, and Jordan.</p>	<p>_____ Scholarly journal</p> <p>_____ Trade publication</p> <p>_____ General interest magazine</p>
B	<p>Cunha, B. A. (2006). West Nile Virus Encephalitis: Clinical Diagnostic and Prognostic Indicators in Compromised Hosts. <i>Clinical Infectious Diseases</i>, 43(1), 117.</p> <p>Abstract (Document Summary): Most patients with WNV encephalitis have diffusely abnormal electroencephalogram findings, but some patients with WNV encephalitis have prominent slowing in the anterior regions, which is not commonly seen in other types of viral encephalitis [5]. In conclusion, in patients with WNV encephalitis or meningoencephalitis, an initial low relative lymphocyte count and/or a highly elevated serum ferritin level (\geqng/mL) may be helpful in suggesting the diagnosis of WNV encephalitis before serological test results are available.</p>	<p>_____ Scholarly journal</p> <p>_____ Trade publication</p> <p>_____ General interest magazine</p>
C	<p>Arias, D. C. (2006, June). Fight the Bite teaches mosquito control, West Nile awareness. <i>The Nation's Health</i>, 36(5), 12.</p> <p>Abstract (Document Summary): Colorado's Fight the Bite campaign to educate the public about West Nile virus prevention is proving an effective weapon there and in many other states. Fight the Bite centers on a two-part solution to West Nile virus: reducing mosquito breeding areas and encouraging personal protection from mosquito bites.</p>	<p>_____ Scholarly journal</p> <p>_____ Trade publication</p> <p>_____ General interest magazine</p>

Sidebar

When evaluating an information source, keep in mind these general criteria and questions:

reliability: Are the facts accurate?

credibility: Is the author an authority on the topic?

perspective: Is the work biased or opinionated?

purpose: Does this material inform, explain, persuade?

Popular magazines

Articles in popular magazines are kept short, with little depth and typically written in simple language to entertain or persuade a general audience by staff or free-lance writers. The heavy graphical format is focused on selling products or services.

Glamour; People Weekly; Reader's Digest; Sports Illustrated

Sensational magazines

Carrying little authority, articles in these publications are written in an inflammatory, sensational style with very simple language. To arouse curiosity among a somewhat gullible audience, outrageous, startling headlines and photographs as well as melodramatic advertising are used.

Globe; National Enquirer; Star; Sun

A: trade publication; B: scholarly journal; C: general interest magazine