

## Is It *Scholarly*? (And why should I care?)

For most academic research and writing you'll want to understand how your topic or question is discussed among scholars in the field of study. Scholarly sources offer a powerful way to develop such an understanding.

(For some research topics you may also want to examine some non-scholarly materials. If you're unsure what types of sources you'll need check with your instructor.)

### Who wrote it?

Do you have reason to believe this person knows a lot about the topic? How do you know? What kind of credentials do they have?

If you can't locate an author, that may suggest the source is less reputable. Note, however, that many credible institutions and government agencies do not list an individual author. Instead the author is considered the organization itself (e.g. American Heart Association; United States Dept. of Education. These aren't scholarly sources, but they are generally considered fairly credible.

### Who reads it?

What do the tone, language, and content suggest about the intended audience? Academic writing is usually intended for subject experts, relies heavily on evidence and analysis, and can be hard to read. Popular writing is meant to be readable by anyone regardless of prior experience with the topic. (If you can find the publication you're reading on a bookstore magazine rack or a .com website it probably isn't scholarly.)

### Who edited it?

Most ongoing publications have an editor. If you can locate an editor(s) what are their credentials? Do they provide information about their publication process? (Most scholarly publications are edited, and often reviewed, by subject experts who evaluate whether the research and writing is valid, logical, and sound.)

### Why was it written?

Was it written to make money and sell many copies? Does it advance knowledge?

### Other questions to ask if you're still not sure:

- Does the author indicate where they got their information? (Do they cite their sources?)
- Is it longer than a page or two?
- For articles in the natural and social sciences on original research studies, is the article structured into sections (abstract, bibliography, introduction, conclusion)?
- Do the pictures/graphs support the text, or are they just there for show?

#### Peer-reviewed articles:

A *peer-reviewed article* is a type of scholarly publication evaluated by field experts and approved before publication. Some instructors require that you use "scholarly peer-reviewed articles," so remember that not all scholarly articles are "peer-reviewed."

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Adapted from "Yeah, but is it scholarly?" University of Michigan MLibrary Instructor College.  
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