

Scholarly vs. Popular Sources

"Scholarly" and "popular" are terms used to describe a source's content, purpose, audience and more. Popular sources are useful for getting ideas for a topic or for background and anecdotal information. Typically, however, you should support your arguments by citing scholarly articles, which contain original research written by experts. Ask your instructor if you're unsure about citing a source.

Major differences:

	Scholarly	Popular
Format	Journals	Magazines, newspapers
Content	Original research and inquiry	General interest stories and opinion pieces; may refer to research studies, but do not contain original research
Purpose	Share research results and expand knowledge base in a discipline	News, entertainment, and general information; advertising and profit
Audience	Professors, researchers, professionals, experts, students	General public
Language	Scholarly or technical language; often require prior knowledge of theory, issues, and jargon	Easily understood language; does not require special knowledge
Author	Experts in the field; name, credentials, and affiliations are provided	Journalists or professional writers who usually are not experts or specialists on the topic. Sometimes no author or credentials are given
Peer review	Usually. Articles are evaluated by other experts in the field; emphasize trustworthiness, validity, and authenticity.	No
Citations	Yes. Cite other sources in text and give full citations/references in footnotes or a bibliography at the end	No. May refer to other sources but rarely give full citations; no bibliography

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Article structure	Include explicitly labelled, discrete parts such as an abstract (article summary) and references (the bibliography). May also include an introduction, background, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, notes, appendices and more	Highly variable structure. May have discrete, titled subsections, but they will unlikely be labelled "Introduction," "Conclusion," etc. Do not have abstracts or bibliographies
Appearance	Serious and simple; often only in black and white	Glossy, full-color pages; high-impact images and design; full-page ads
Images	Sometimes. May contain charts, diagrams and tables; photography is rare outside of art, architecture, and archaeology journals	Yes. Heavily illustrated with lots of photos
Advertisements	Rarely. If so, they are small and discreet, often text only (no images)	Yes. A significant portion of an issue is allocated to ads
Length	Longer, though variable. Usually 10-30 pages	Shorter. A couple hundred words to a few pages

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