

# How to Identify and Read a Scholarly Article or Book

## Instructions and Exercise

Scholarly articles are published in scholarly journals.

**How do you know if the journal is scholarly?** Not all periodicals in research databases are scholarly. Follow these criteria:

### Scholarly journals:

- always cite their sources with in-text cites, footnotes, or endnotes, as well as a “References” or “Works Cited” list at the end of every article
- articles are written by scholars in the field, with recognized academic credentials in the field that the journal covers
- usually publish quarterly or less often, although some are more frequent
- this usually can’t be seen if viewed online, but they rarely contain glossy pages, colorful pictures, or advertising. They look very black and white and serious
- the purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experiments so that other scholars can use that information to improve their own research. It is assumed that the contents of scholarly journals have not been influenced by advertising or less obvious bias by special interests
- most scholarly journals are published by an organization of professionals in that field, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) which publishes many journals in the fields of psychology, mental health, and counseling

### What isn’t a scholarly journal? What isn’t acceptable for academic papers?

Weekly or monthly magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New Republic*, or *National Review*; and newspapers such as *The New York Times*, can be good sources of news or opinion on current issues, but they are not written by scholars in a field, do not cite their sources, and are not intended for academic research. Advertisers and other special interests may influence the contents and opinions in these magazines. You may use these occasionally for current factual information and opinion.

**Trade journals**, which cover a particular industry such as *Beverage World* or *Automotive News*, are acceptable sources for management papers, but you must also have scholarly, academic articles.

### How do I know if a book is acceptable for scholarly research?

- Check the author’s credentials. What is the author’s education, job experience, affiliations?
- Does the author explain how the research was conducted or on what the theories are based? Are these methods credible?
- For all quotes, paraphrases, and facts, are sources cited in the text?
- Is there a bibliography or reference list? How credible are these sources?

**If unsure if an article is scholarly, ask your instructor or a reference librarian.**

## How to read a scholarly article or book

As you read the article or book, finish the sentence for each point:

- **The main purpose of this article or book is . . .** [State as accurately as possible the author’s purpose for writing the article. In order to demonstrate the author’s purpose you will have to furnish some background information on the topic so you may need to consult your textbook about the topic]
- **The key question that the author is asking is . . .** [Figure out the key question in the mind of the author when he/she wrote the article]

- ***The most important information in this article or book is/concerns . . .*** [Identify the facts, data, or resources the author uses to support his/her argument. To expand on this statement you will have to look at the foot or endnotes]
- ***The main conclusion[s]/inference[s] in this article or book is/are . . .*** [Identify the key conclusions the author comes to and presents in the article]
- ***The main assumptions underlying the author's thinking are . . .*** [Think about what the author is assuming to be true and what might be questioned. To expand on this statement you will need to think about the larger context of the topic]
- ***If we accept the author's line of reasoning, the implications are . . .*** [What consequence does the author's argument have on our understanding of current research and/or theory?]
- ***If we reject the author's line of reasoning, the implications are . . .*** [What consequence does rejecting the author's argument have on our understanding of current research and theory?]
- ***When writing this article or book, the author's point of view may have been influenced by . . .*** [Scholars are influenced by events that occurred during the time when they wrote; by personal prejudices; or by hidden agendas, such as pressure from those who paid them to do the research.]

The answers to these questions are often found in the first 2-3 pages and the last 2-3 pages of an article, or in the Introduction and Conclusion of a book, so read these first. Reading these pages can give you the "big picture" of what the author is trying to say, so you can then read the full article or book and determine for yourself whether he or she has done an adequate job of supporting their thesis.

### **An Exercise in Reading a Scholarly Article Critically**

- Find an appropriate scholarly article that interests you and is relevant to your research topic.
- Use each of the points above as the first sentence of an expanded paragraph on that particular point. Be sure to include the bibliographic citation for the article in APA format.

### **Where to find a scholarly journal article:**

- in the databases EBSCOhost or Wilson Select Plus in Cambridge College Online Library.
- in a print scholarly journal, most likely found in a traditional library

This handout was closely adapted from a webpage posted by Ed Byerly of The Victoria College. His original webpage can be viewed at <http://www.victoriacollege.edu/~ebyerly/ArtCrit.htm>  
Byerly credited the statements in the criteria for reading a scholarly article as an adaptation from *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools* by Richard Paul and Linda Elder.