Scholarly Journals: How Can You Tell?

When conducting research it is important to distinguish between journal articles and magazine articles. Journal articles are typically referred to as "scholarly," while magazine articles are usually considered "popular". A third category, "trade" (or "professional") magazines or journals, are written for professionals in a particular field but are not strictly research-related. The following chart lists additional characteristics which distinguish scholarly journals from other types of journals/magazines. It uses examples from the field of Criminology, but the criteria are applicable to all subject areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Scholarly Journal</th>
<th>Popular Magazine</th>
<th>Trade Magazine/Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Justice Quarterly</td>
<td>Maclean's</td>
<td>Justice Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Cover</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Justice Quarterly" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Maclean's" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Justice Report" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Purpose</td>
<td>&quot;A refereed [i.e. peer-reviewed], multi-disciplinary journal that publishes theoretical, empirical and interpretive studies [i.e. research articles] of issues related to criminal justice.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Canada’s national magazine”</td>
<td>&quot;Quarterly news report”  “Contains information of value to [Canadian Criminal Justice] Association readers and the public interested in matters related to the administration of justice ... to encourage reflection and action on the criminal justice system throughout Canada.”</td>
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<td>Example Article Title</td>
<td>&quot;Do Criminal Court Outcomes Vary by Juvenile Transfer Mechanism? A Multi-Jurisdictional, Multilevel Analysis”</td>
<td>“The real reason crime is falling so fast”</td>
<td>“The indigenous experience: Is it important to know about this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$1,257 USD/year (7 issues)</td>
<td>$31/year (50 issues)</td>
<td>$48/year (4 issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Academics and Professionals</td>
<td>General public</td>
<td>People in the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Experts or specialists (PhD). Article will usually indicate where they do research. Unpaid.</td>
<td>Journalists, staff writers, or freelance writers. Some articles don’t name the author. Paid.</td>
<td>Staff writers, industry specialists, or vendor representatives. Usually paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References/Works Cited</td>
<td>Usually many in-text citations and a LONG list of references (or footnotes in legal articles).</td>
<td>Rarely include citations.</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KPU Library Guide by Chris Burns, Criminology Liaison Librarian (Fall 2017)
Based on “Teach Yourself: Understanding Scholarly Sources” created by North Carolina State University Libraries.
Is this a scholarly (peer-reviewed) journal article? Ask yourself:

Authors:

- Are the **authors’ names** given?
  - Scholarly articles are NEVER anonymous.
- Does it indicate on the first or last page of the article where at least one of the authors does his/her research?
  - Almost all scholarly articles are written by people doing research at a university or other research organization. Their “affiliation” will be listed in the article.

Length:

- **How many pages** long is the article?
  - Scholarly articles tend to be quite long. They will almost never be less than 5-pages long.

Content:

- Is there a **short summary** (called an abstract) at the beginning of the article?
  - Almost all scholarly articles will have an abstract which summarizes the key points of the article.
- Is it written for people who are already familiar with this subject?
  - Scholarly articles are written by experts for other experts. Authors assume that you are familiar with the vocabulary used by people doing research in this area. This means that the articles can be difficult to read if you are new to the topic.
- Are there **tables and charts**? [Common but not essential]
  - Original research articles will have a detailed methodology section and will often display findings in tables and charts.
  - Articles that summarize research done by other people may not have these.

Citations:

- Are there a lot of **in-text citations** to scholarly sources in the article?
  - ALL scholarly articles will include MANY in-text citations (or footnotes/endnotes) where the authors give credit to the source of an idea. Usually this in-text citation only lists the author’s last name(s), year of publication, and (if it’s a direct quotation) a page number.
  - This is essential in scholarly writing. When you take an idea from someone else – even if you put it into your own words – you MUST cite it. If you don’t, you are plagiarizing. This is a serious academic offence.

- Is there a long list of **references** (or Works Cited) at the end of the article?
  - You will always find a long list of references at the end of a scholarly article which provide all the citation details that you would need in order to find the exact source that the author used.
  - Note: if the author is using footnotes, they may put the full citation in the footnote, and not need to have a list of references at the end.