Finding Peer-Reviewed, Primary Research Journal Articles in Criminology

This guide will help you to:

- Learn the difference between peer-reviewed (scholarly) articles and other journal articles
- Distinguish primary from secondary research articles
- Build effective search strategies to find peer-reviewed, primary research articles

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physical features</th>
<th>Peer-Reviewed Journals Aka ‘Scholarly’ or ‘Academic’</th>
<th>Popular Journals and Magazines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly structured format with an abstract (summary) and section headings. Mostly text, with few photos or graphics, except for tables. Minimal and very selective advertising (e.g. science lab tools).</td>
<td>Attractive, information format, often slick and glossy. Extensive general ads (e.g. car, computer or iPod ads).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To inform, report the results of original research to the rest of the scholarly world in the field.</td>
<td>To entertain a general audience. Articles usually don’t intend to present an idea with supporting evidence, hence the lack of citations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Author is an expert in the field. His / her credentials and affiliations are always listed.</td>
<td>Articles are usually written by journalists or professional writers. Author is usually not an expert and may not even be named.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Scholars, researchers, other experts in the field, upper-level students. Articles include specialized terminology and jargon of the field of study. Require prior knowledge.</td>
<td>General public. Articles use simple language to meet a minimum level of education, and are short, with little depth. No previous familiarity with subject required.</td>
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<td>Sources used</td>
<td>Articles ALWAYS include references to other works, usually in footnotes, citation and bibliographies. Scholars are very careful to give credit to other authors whose ideas they’ve used.</td>
<td>Articles rarely cite sources of information or include references to other works.</td>
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<td>Examples</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Criminology &amp; Criminal Justice, Crime &amp; Delinquency, Police Quarterly</td>
<td>Time, Maclean’s</td>
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What are Peer-Reviewed Journals?

Peer-reviewed journals publish articles written by scholars in a specific field that have been rigorously reviewed by other experts (the author’s peers) for their importance, quality and accuracy. They are often called ‘scholarly’ or ‘academic’ journals. Peer-review is a form of scholarly quality control.
What are primary sources?

The precise definition of a primary source depends on the discipline of study. When Criminology instructors ask you to find primary sources, they usually want you to locate journal articles or other reports which are the first publication of new research findings.

Secondary sources of information describe, explain, interpret or summarize primary sources. These include encyclopedias, book reviews, commentaries, literature reviews, and any books or journal articles that simply discuss the original (previously-published) work of others.

Ways to find primary research articles in peer-reviewed Criminology journals

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<th>Strategy #1: Browsing</th>
<th>Find a peer-reviewed criminology journal and look at the Table of Contents (the list of articles in a specific issue)</th>
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<td>Strategy #2: ‘Citation mining’</td>
<td>Look at the list of references in an article or book you already have</td>
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<td>Strategy #3: Finding a specialized bibliography</td>
<td>On your topic</td>
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<td>Strategy #4: Using a research database</td>
<td>To find an article on a specific topic</td>
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Strategy #1: Browsing a recent issue of a peer-reviewed criminology journal

This is a good way to find articles if you don’t have a specific topic in mind. There are many peer-reviewed criminology journals. Find a recent issue of any one of them and look at the articles listed at the front of the journal in the Table of Contents to see if any sound interesting to you.

Kwantlen Library pays for access to these journals. They are not usually available for free on the web. I’ve listed a few important, peer-reviewed criminology journals below that are available to Kwantlen students. Use the Journal Titles search from the library’s homepage to look up a specific journal and browse recent issues.

British Journal of Criminology
Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice Crime and Delinquency
Criminal Justice & Behavior
Criminology
Criminology & Criminal Justice
Journal of Criminal Justice
Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology
Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency
Justice Quarterly
Social Justice
Theoretical Criminology

Note: Browsing is not a good strategy if you want an article on a specific topic such as: “Does an injection drug site reduce crime in its neighbourhood?”

Finding Peer-Reviewed, Primary Research Articles in Criminology (prepared by Chris Burns, January 2017)
see: http://libguides.kpu.ca/crim/1208
Strategy # 2: Go ‘citation mining’

If you’ve read about an interesting study in a textbook, an article or another secondary source, look in that source’s list of references (it may be called a bibliography) for a citation to the original study, i.e. to the primary research.

A citation gives you the information you need to get your hands on an article. (That’s one of the reasons it’s important to cite things properly!) There are many citation styles, so the details may vary a bit, but be sure to note the author’s name(s), article title, journal title, date (year), volume & issue number, plus page numbers. Here is an example in APA style:


Once you know exactly which journal you want (e.g. Security Journal), you can search for that journal title in the Kwantlen Library’s list of Journal Titles to see if we have the issue you need.

Strategy # 3: Look for specialized bibliographies on your subject

Someone else may have made a list of important articles, books, etc. on your topic already. It will probably include some peer-reviewed, primary sources. Don’t re-invent the wheel! This type of list might be called a bibliography or ‘literature review’. Some bibliographies have annotations (brief critical summaries) of each document – bonus! There are several ways to find bibliographies:

a. In the library catalogue:

Some bibliographies are published as books and are listed in the library catalogue. To find them, add the subject keyword BIBLIOGRAPHY to your search.

b. Online:

I’ve listed a few collections of bibliographies (with links) on the Library’s Criminology Subject Guide! http://libguides.kpu.ca/crim

c. In an article index:

Look for a ‘literature review’ article on your topic. These identify and compare important studies and summarize the ‘state of the field.’ See Strategy #4 for tips on how to do this in different databases.

Strategy # 4: Use a research database to locate articles on your topic

Choose your Research Database

Most of the library’s research databases list citation for articles from many different journals, and often provide the full-text for the articles. Each database covers different journals, though they sometimes overlap. Some indexes focus on criminology journals and are great places to start. The major ones are:

Criminal Justice Abstracts
Criminal Justice Periodicals Index
Sage Journals
Tips for Finding Primary Sources in Criminology Research Databases

Here are some general tips to help you pinpoint original research articles, along with some search tips for specific Criminology databases at KPU.

1. **Use the Advanced Search screen**

   Go to the advanced search screen for every database, if you aren’t taken there automatically. You’ll be able to build a much more precise search this way. Most of the following options are only available from the advanced search screen.

2. **Restrict your search to scholarly/peer-reviewed articles**

   Many article databases give you the option to restrict your search to only scholarly sources with a check box saying ‘academic’, ‘scholarly’ or ‘peer-reviewed’. This is a handy feature but it’s not completely reliable; double-check if an article has the characteristics of a peer-reviewed journal.

3. **Check to see if you can limit your search by research methodology**

   Many indexes will describe the ‘research methodology’ used by the authors. In other words, how the research was done. You can add some typical methodological terms to your search to find such articles. See below for some specific suggestions.

**Criminal Justice Abstracts** (CJA)

Usually adds a subject term (CJA calls them ‘descriptors’) for the research methodology to each article’s description. Try using these words as descriptors:

- qualitative methods
- quantitative methods
- interviews

**Criminal Justice Periodical Index** (CJPI)

Like CJA, this index usually adds a subject term to describe the research methodology, but they’re not all the same. Here are some examples:

- action research
- qualitative research
- mathematical models

**Sage Premier Collection**

This includes 20 journals published by Sage, the same company that publishes CJA. It doesn’t always use subject terms (descriptors). You’re better off searching for methodology keywords that might appear in an article’s abstract. See the examples listed for CJPI and CJA for ideas. Here are some other keywords you can try:

- study OR studies
- experiment
- data
- sample
- methods OR methodology

- survey
- regression
- analysis
- statistics OR statistical

**PsycINFO**

Scroll down the Advanced Search screen to the box labeled ‘Publication Type’ and select ‘Peer Reviewed Journal’. Scroll a bit further to a box labeled ‘Methodology’ if you want to narrow your search to ‘Empirical Study’ or ‘Field Study’ or ‘Mathematical Model’. You can get even more specific. Do not choose ‘Meta-Analysis’ or ‘Literature Review’ methodologies unless you want articles that describe and critique other works. These will be secondary, not primary sources.