Types of Periodicals

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Periodicals are publications that come out on a regular schedule. They include magazines, journals, and newspapers. Periodical articles are often the best sources for research, especially if your topic requires recent information, specific information, or local coverage. There are five main types of periodicals:

- Scholarly
- Trade/Professional
- General Interest/Substantive News
- Popular
- Sensational

It is important to be able to distinguish between the different types of periodicals in order to determine the level of scholarship within a particular periodical. While non-scholarly periodicals will often contain interesting and useful information on a topic, they are not always effective in supporting arguments in research papers. Instructors will also often require that only articles from scholarly periodicals be used as sources in assignments.


Scholarly

Purpose – Intended to present original research, experimentation, and opinion in a given field.

Topics – Specific, highly specialized topics in a given field.

Author – Articles written by scholars and researchers in a given field. The author’s name and credentials are usually prominently displayed.

Audience – Intended for other scholars and researchers in the field as well as specialized readers. The audience is usually assumed to have some knowledge of the subject.

Format – Articles are generally long and are presented in standard scholarly format (abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, conclusion, references). Sources are cited in bibliographies and/or footnotes.

Publication – Usually published by educational organizations, professional organizations, or scholarly publishers. Articles selected for publication have been reviewed by a panel of experts in the field (peer review).

Appearance – Simple layout. Photography and other forms of illustrations rarely used except to support or explain an important idea or concept. Some subject-related advertising.

Language – Formal, scholarly language incorporating technical or subject-specific terminology.

Examples: Journal of Education, JAMA, American Sociological Review

Trade/Professional

Purpose – Intended to inform professionals and experts of new trends, news, products, and developments in a given industry or profession.

Topics – Specific, highly specialized topics in a given field.

Author – Articles written by experts or professionals in a given field or journalists with subject expertise.

Audience – Intended for other experts or professionals in the field. The audience is usually assumed to have some knowledge of the subject.

Format – Articles are usually long with few if any footnotes or references.

Publication – Published by industry or professional organizations as well as commercial publishers.

Appearance – Photography and other forms of illustrations rarely used except to support or explain an important idea or concept. Any advertising is generally subject-related.
Language – Professional language incorporating subject-specific and technical terminology.
Examples: Publishers Weekly, Advertising Age, Nursing Management, Macworld

General Interest/Substantive News
Purpose – Intended to provide general or subject-specific information to a broad audience.
Topics – General interest subjects, news, and current events.
Author – Articles written by staff or freelance journalists and writers, occasionally by an expert or scholar in a field.
Audience – Intended for an educated audience without any particular subject specialty.
Format – Shorter articles with references occasionally cited.
Publication – Usually published by commercial publishers. Occasionally published by professional organizations.
Appearance – Heavy use of photography and other forms of illustration. Large amounts of advertising aimed at the general public.
Language – Language appropriate for an educated audience with minimal subject-specific or technical terminology.
Examples: The Seattle Times, National Geographic, The Nation

Popular
Purpose – Intended to provide general information and/or entertainment to a broad audience, sell products, and/or promote a certain point of view.
Topics – General interest topics and current events.
Author – Articles written by staff or freelance writers. Author name and/or credentials not always given.
Audience – Intended for a general audience without any specific educational background or subject expertise.
Format – Short, simple articles meant to entertain more than inform. References are rarely cited and the original source of the information provided is often unclear.
Examples: National Enquirer, Star Magazine

Sensational
Purpose – To provoke, arouse curiosity, and promote popular superstitions.
Topics – Celebrity gossip, sensational “news” stories outside the bounds of credible journalism.
Author – Articles written by staff or freelance writers. Authorship not always indicated.
Audience – Intended for the curious. A certain level of gullibility and superstition is assumed.
Format – Short articles frequently containing unsubstantiated information.
Publication – Published by commercial publishers.
Appearance – Heavy use of photography and other forms of illustration. Large amounts of advertising aimed at the general public.
Language – Simple, often provocative language in the text with shocking, attention-grabbing headlines.
Examples: National Enquirer, Star Magazine

References