



**Pellissippi Library Skill Guide #4**  
**Distinguishing Scholarly From Non-Scholarly Periodicals**

Journals and magazines are important sources for up-to-date information in all disciplines. Because we get many different types of periodicals here at Pellissippi, it can be difficult to distinguish between the various levels of scholarship found in the collection. In this guide, the criteria for periodical literature is divided into four categories: 1) Scholarly, 2) Substantive News or General Interest, 3) Popular, and 4) Sensational.

**DEFINITIONS**

Webster’s *Third International Dictionary* defines “scholarly” as: 1) concerned with academic study, especially research, 2) exhibiting the methods and attitudes of a scholar, and 3) having the manner and appearance of a scholar. “Substantive” is defined as “having a solid base, being substantial.” “Popular” means “fit for, or reflecting the taste and intelligence of the people at large.” “Sensational” is defined as “arousing or intending to arouse strong curiosity, interest or reaction.” Keeping these definitions in mind, and realizing that none of the lines drawn between types of journals can ever be totally clear cut, we can say that in general the criteria are as follows:

<b>SCHOLARLY</b>	<b>SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST</b>
<p>Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts but few glossy pages or exciting pictures.</p> <p>Scholarly journals <u>always</u> cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies.</p> <p>Articles are written by a scholar in the field or by someone who has done research in the field.</p> <p>The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some scholarly background on the part of the reader.</p> <p>The main purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experimentation in order to make such information available to the rest of the scholarly world.</p> <p>Many scholarly journals, though by no means all, are published by a specific professional organization.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS</b></p> <p><i>College English</i>  <i>Contemporary Literature</i>  <i>JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association</i>  <i>Journal of Black Psychology</i>  <i>Psychological Bulletin</i></p>	<p>These periodicals may be quite attractive in appearance, although some are in newspaper format. Articles are often heavily illustrated, generally with photographs.</p> <p>News and general interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often do not.</p> <p>Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar or a freelance writer.</p> <p>The language of these publications is geared to any educated audience. There is no specialty assumed, only interest and certain level of intelligence.</p> <p>They are generally published by commercial enterprises or individuals, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.</p> <p>The main purpose of a periodical in this category is to provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concern citizens.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST PERIODICALS</b></p> <p><i>Economist</i>  <i>National Geographic</i>  <i>New York times</i>  <i>Scientific American</i>  <i>Vital Speeches of the Day</i></p>

POPULAR	SENSATIONAL
<p>Popular periodicals come in many formats, although often somewhat slick and attractive in appearance. They include lots of graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.).</p> <p>The publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information published in such journals is often second or third hand and the original source is sometimes obscure.</p> <p>Articles are usually very short, written in simple language and are designed to meet a minimal education level. There is generally little depth to the content of these articles.</p> <p>Articles are written by staff member or freelance writers.</p> <p>The main purpose of popular periodicals is to entertain the reader, to sell products (their own or their advertisers'), and/or to promote a viewpoint.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLES OF POPULAR PERIODICALS</b></p> <p><i>Ebony</i>  <i>Parents</i>  <i>People Weekly</i>  <i>Reader's Digest</i>  <i>Sports Illustrated</i>  <i>Time</i>  <i>Vogue</i></p>	<p>Sensational periodicals come in a variety of style, but often use a newspaper format.</p> <p>Their language is elementary and occasionally inflammatory or sensational. They assume a certain gullibility in their audience.</p> <p>The main purpose of sensation magazines seems to be to arouse curiosity and to cater to popular superstitions. They often do so with flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g., "Half-man Half-woman Makes Self Pregnant").</p> <p>Most libraries do not subscribe to sensational periodicals.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLES OF SENSATIONAL PERIODICALS</b></p> <p>Globe  National Examiner  Star  Weekly World News</p>

**NOTE:**

There are reference books , which attempt to describe and evaluate periodical titles. If you need further information about an individual title, we suggest you consult the following publication:

Katz, Bill, and Linda Sternberger Katz. *Magazines for Libraries*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Providence, NJ: Bowker, 2000.  
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"...an annotated listing by subject of some 6,500 periodicals." (Preface.) Each entry gives the name of the periodical, beginning publication date, publisher, editor, address, price and such information as indexing, size and level of audience. Short abstracts describe the scope, political slant and other aspects of the publication. Arrangement is topical which brings magazines and journals on like subjects together. To find an individual title, use the title index at the end of the volume.