

## What are Popular and Scholarly Sources? Brought to you by the University of Houston Libraries

So, you have an assignment that calls for a certain number of scholarly and popular sources. But with so much information out there, how can you tell the difference between popular and scholarly sources?

Let's start with describing some of the characteristics of popular sources. Popular sources include many magazines, newspapers, and websites. They are often eye-catching. These sources are geared toward a broad, general audience. The articles are reviewed by professional staff editor(s). When you look inside, you will notice popular articles tend to be more visual, often having a larger number of graphics than text. They may also have special layouts and/or advertisements. The language is meant to be understood by the general population. The articles do not usually list references or notes.

When you find popular sources in an online library database you may notice that they look different than in print. Instead of images, you'll see a list of image descriptions. It may have the look and feel of an academic source because it doesn't have a nice visual appearance, but it is still a popular article because it has the same content that you would find in a physical magazine or newspaper.

How are popular sources used? Popular sources may present news and current events. The review process to publish popular articles is short, so they can be a good place to look for very current information. They may tell human interest stories or convey emotional responses. They can also be useful for getting an overview of a topic.

On the other hand, scholarly sources are published in subject-specific journals. Some examples include *Political Communication*, *Zoo Biology*, and *American Literature*. Scholarly journals are typically available through subscription only. You usually can't find them in stores. These articles are written by and geared towards scholars and experts in their respective fields. They undergo review by other scholars in the field which is known as the peer review process.

Some scholarly articles will incorporate images, graphs and charts, but tend to have a smaller proportion of graphics in comparison to text. The language is subject-specific and may include unfamiliar terms. Articles usually include a list of references or notes, which can be helpful for finding additional sources and information. Scholarly literature is useful for gathering subject-specific information, research, and data. Scholarly articles may present or review in-depth research on a given topic. It is a way for scholars to share research and information as well as adding to the academic conversation.

Now let's compare two articles. Both of these articles are on the topic of burnout in Millennials. The first article is from a popular source, a website called BuzzFeed. The language of the article is easy to understand and is written for a broad audience. There are eye-catching images spread throughout the piece. Notice that there are not any notes or references included at the end. These are some of the characteristics that give it away as a popular article.

The second article is a scholarly article. It is from *The Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*. The title of the publication gives you a clue that it is a scholarly source. The authors include their academic affiliations and subject expertise. The articles' language is geared toward other scholars in their field. It uses some subject-specific terms. Also notice that

this article includes a list of references at the end. These are some of the characteristics that give it away as a scholarly article.

Hopefully now the differences between popular and scholarly sources are clearer. As you start to look for sources, you can always reach out to the UH Libraries for help.