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What is a ‘scholarly article’?
There is no absolute definition for a ‘scholarly article.’ However, scholarly articles share some characteristics that set them aside from other types of articles, such as magazine or newspaper articles. Scholarly articles are written by experts—usually people in academia (e.g., professors or researchers) or professionals in the field that have extensive experience and knowledge about the topic. Scholarly articles are often published in peer-reviewed journals, but not all scholarly articles are peer-reviewed.

A peer-reviewed journal article is reviewed by other experts who check to ensure that the information is unbiased, the methodology is sound, and the information included is reliable and valid.

Scholarly articles in different disciplines will have somewhat different formats—for example, biology articles will adhere to the scientific method which includes various components, such as methods and results, that philosophy or art history articles may not. Though there is some variation among scholarly articles, they all follow a similar structure and share similar characteristics when compared to typical magazine articles.

Identifying scholarly articles
Scholarly articles will:
1. include some or all of the following parts—
   a. abstract (summary of the paper)
   b. introduction (background information, the author’s purpose for writing the article as well as her hypothesis)
   c. methodology (explanation of the processes and protocols that were followed in order to carry out the study)
   d. results (data, analyzed for statistical significance, including figures and tables)
   e. discussion (description of the significance and implications of the results)
   f. conclusion (final thoughts about the issue and future considerations)
   g. bibliography (list of references that were consulted by the author)
2. include evidence that supports the authors’ assertions. This evidence can come from:
   a. past articles & research
   b. case studies
   c. new, original, research that the authors conduct themselves
   d. The references will be listed at the end of the article in the bibliography (list of references) and will be included in the text as footnotes or in-text citations.
3. have layouts that are typically much different from other types of articles, with:
   a. very little or no advertising
   b. layouts that are plain and do not contain artwork or decorative fonts
   c. sections that are labeled by the section names (see bullet point #1 above), rather than with creative titles
   d. graphics such as figures and tables that represent the data from the results section, rather than decorative artwork or photographs
   e. a large number of references to other sources, which are included as footnotes or in-text citations. The bibliography or reference list (found at the end) is fairly long and includes other scholarly articles.

For more information, contact: Tim Miller - 826-4959 - tim.miller@humboldt.edu
How to find scholarly articles

Many online databases allow you to filter your results to just scholarly or peer-reviewed articles. Using these filters is usually the easiest way to quickly determine if an article is scholarly. In the absence of such databases, you will need to take a close look at the articles you find to determine if they are scholarly, keeping in mind the various ways to identify scholarly articles listed above. You will not find scholarly articles in popular magazines and newspapers. Academic journals and library databases (including Google Scholar) are the best places to search.

How to read scholarly articles

Your approach to reading scholarly articles should be different from that of reading magazine or newspaper articles. Do not read the article from beginning to end-

Start by reading the abstract and then skip ahead to the discussion or conclusion to determine if the outcomes are relevant to your assignment and topic.

Remember, you are looking for evidence that is relevant to your topic and can be used as evidence in your paper. If the article does not appear to meet that need, move on to another. However, in some cases you may find some of the information useful as background information for your introduction- the article doesn’t need to fit in perfectly for it to be relevant to your topic. For example, if your topic is an examination of the effects of light irradiation therapy on muscle pain, you may find an article about light irradiation therapy as a treatment for bone degeneration to be useful because it discusses the mechanism of and protocol for using light irradiation therapy. This information can be useful for your rationale for the methodology of your study even though the results of the study are not directly relevant to your topic.

Strategy

1. Start with the abstract- it includes a summary of the purpose and findings. If the article appears to be relevant to your topic and meets the requirements of your assignment, you will want to read for deeper meaning.
2. Next, read the introduction, which will give a clear concept of the author’s purpose and rationale for conducting their study.
3. Now skip ahead to the discussion and/or conclusion to understand what the implications of their results were and how it is relevant to the field (e.g. how their findings can be applied in real life situations).
4. The methods section will include the study protocol, including a description of the participants, how they were chosen, and a description of the intervention.
5. The results section will include the raw data that was collected as well as statistical analyses to determine if there were any significant differences or correlations. The raw data may look compelling at first glance, but the statistical analysis will indicate if there is any real significance to those first impressions.

Resources:

- How to read an academic paper (UBC iSchool) - http://tinyurl.com/reading-articles [Video]
- ‘Predatory Reading’ (Bowdoin College) - http://tinyurl.com/predatory-reading
- Tips for Reading Scholarly and Research Articles (Brandeis University) - http://tinyurl.com/scholarly-tips
- How to Read and Take Notes on a Scholarly Journal Article (Pasadena City College) - http://tinyurl.com/read-scholarly

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