

## Module 2.3 Popular and Scholarly Sources

Scholarly and popular sources are created to fulfill different information needs. Popular sources serve an immediate, quick, and sometimes exploratory need. They are generally not written by an expert on the topic or reviewed by other experts before publication, but are intended for the general public and written in an informal tone and scope.

Other characteristics of popular articles may include:

- the focus of the article is on selling to the general public: they contain advertisements and are designed to be attractive
- the article is meant to fulfill an immediate information need of general interest.
- the origin of the information in the article may not always be apparent or fully disclosed in a list of cited works.

Scholarly or peer-reviewed sources of information are written by experts in a subject area as a result of in-depth research. Before it can be published, the article is reviewed and approved by other subject experts.

Other characteristics of scholarly articles may include:

- the focus of the article is on presenting information clearly and simply: they contain little advertisement, if any.
- the article contains research in a specific field and published by specialized and niche sources for a discriminating and limited audience.
- the origin of the information contained in the article is always apparent and fully disclosed in a list of cited works.

There are other tools that can assist in deducing whether the journal is scholarly or popular. Search for the journal title in *Ulrich's* or *MLA Directory of Periodicals* databases. You can access these databases from the homepage of the library website, and search the name of the databases in the *Search for Databases* tab.

Please note, not all journals are listed in *Ulrich's* or *MLA Directory of Periodicals*, so it is important to combine the use of article characteristics with the databases.

Knowing whether an article is scholarly or not will help you determine the trustworthiness, authority and general quality of its content. However, information presented in popular articles can be equally trustworthy. Both publication types must be read critically and evaluated on an individual basis in order to determine whether they are error-free. Errors may find their way in the most discriminatory of journals.