



# Is It Scholarly?

## How Do I... Undergraduate Research Guides

Part of the “Evaluate My Sources” Series

### In this guide you will learn how to:

- Explain what a scholarly source is
- Ask the right questions when evaluating sources
- Evaluate various kinds of information sources such as books and articles

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## General Tips for Evaluating Sources

Scholarly sources (also referred to as academic, peer-reviewed, or referred) are written by experts in a particular field and serve to keep others interested in that field up to date on the most recent research, findings, and news. These resources will provide the most substantial information for your research and papers

## What is peer-review?

When a source has been peer-reviewed it has undergone the review and scrutiny of a review board of colleagues in the author's field. They evaluate this source as part of the body of research for a particular discipline and make recommendations regarding its publication in a journal, revisions prior to publication, or, in some cases, reject its publication.

## Why use scholarly sources?

Because of the level of authority and credibility evident in scholarly sources they contribute a great deal to the overall quality of your papers. Use of scholarly sources is an expected attribute of academic course work.

## How can I tell if a source is scholarly?

The characteristics on the other side of this handout can help you differentiate scholarly sources from those that are not. Be sure and look at the criteria in each category when making your determination, rather than basing your decision on only one criteria.

# Criteria:

## Authors

- Are author names included?
- Are the author's credentials provided?
- Are the credentials relevant to the information provided?

## Publishers

- Who is the publisher of the information?
- Is the publisher an academic institution, scholarly, or professional organization?
- Is their purpose for publishing this source evident?

## Currency/Timeliness

- Is the date of publication evident?
- Is currency of the information crucial to your research?

## Audience

- Who is the intended audience of this source?
- Is the language geared toward those with knowledge of a specific discipline or the general public?

## Content

- Why is the information being provided or the article written?
- Are sources cited?
- Are there references to other writings on this topic?
- Are there charts, graphs, tables, and bibliographies included?
- Are research claims documented?
- Are conclusions based on evidence provided?
- How long is the source?

## Additional Tips for Specific Types of Sources:

Each specific resource type will also have criteria that can be applied to that source. The following list provides additional pointers for determining scholarly content of books, periodical articles, and web pages.

### Books

- Date of publication and currency
  - \* Is the information current enough for your purposes?
  - \* Is a historical perspective important?
- Publishers
  - \* University press – likely to be scholarly
  - \* Professional organizations and the U.S. Government Printing Office can also be indicators of scholarly content.
- Are there any book reviews?
  - \* Check sources such as Book Review Index or search databases in the subject area or your topic to locate book reviews.

### Articles

- Is biographical information for the author provided?
- Who is the publisher?
- How frequently is the periodical published?
- How many and what kinds of advertisements are present? For example, is the advertising clearly geared towards readers in a specific discipline or occupation?
- For more specific guidelines in identifying periodical types see the following.
  - \* Is it scholarly? Distinguishing Periodical Types:
    - ⇒ <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/ugl/howdoi/pertype.html>

### Web pages

- What is the domain of the page?
- Who is publishing or sponsoring the page?
  - \* Strip back the URL to discover the source of the page.
- Is contact information for the author/publisher provided?
- How recently was the page updated?
- Be particularly wary of bias when viewing web pages. Anyone can create a web page about any topic. YOU must verify the validity of the information.
- For more specific guidelines in evaluating web pages see the following.
  - \* Evaluating Internet Sources:
    - ⇒ <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/ugl/howdoi/webeval.html>

**Check out other How Do I... Guides in this series, Evaluate My Sources:**

- **Choosing the Best Source**
- **Evaluating Internet Sources**