Recognizing Academic Sources

When conducting research for an assignment it is important to recognize the types of information sources you are examining. Depending on the assignment, you may be required to use a certain type of source, like a peer-reviewed article from a scholarly/academic journal, for example.

Check out some characteristics of different types of sources to help guide you in choosing an appropriate source.

**Scholarly Sources**
- Contain content written by scholars and researchers for an academic audience
- Are usually peer reviewed
- Disseminate new research or knowledge
- Always include works cited or references
- Contain little or no advertising
- Are frequently produced by recognized academic publishers or university presses

**Scholarly Journals vs. Scholarly Books**
- Journals are more heavily used in the scientific fields because they tend to have a narrow focus on one research study or topic.
- Books are often used in the humanities because they provide an in-depth, thorough exploration of a topic, and often synthesize a broad range of sources or research.

**Non-Scholarly Periodicals**
- Are not peer reviewed
- Contain advertising
- Fall into two major categories: Trade journals and consumer/popular magazines

**Trade Journals**
- Contain industry news, trends, and information aimed at practitioners in a particular profession
- Seldom present research findings
- Contain glossy pages and advertising and use technical language related to the trade area
- Sometimes include a small list of works cited

**Consumer or Popular Magazines**
- Contain articles written by journalists and staff writers for a general audience
- Focus is geared toward profits rather than academia, so they contain lots of advertising and articles that have popular appeal
- Rarely cite their sources

For more information on this topic, watch University of Houston-Clear Lake’s “Recognizing Academic Sources” video.

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