

Scholarly VS. Popular Sources

Created by WI+RE at the UCLA Library

This handout is your roadmap to understanding the differences between scholarly and popular sources!

What's the Difference?

Scholarly Sources present original research, are written by researchers for researcher audiences, and often undergo a peer-review process (Learn more about [Peer Review at Purdue](#)). They include some telltale signs like citations to other research, and are published by a research institution or professional organization.

Popular Sources are written for broader audiences rather than scholarly ones. While they may refer to research, they do not present original research. Popular sources are never peer-reviewed, often don't include citations, and can be shorter - such as news articles.

What are some examples?

Scholarly

- Academic articles and journals
- Conference publications
- Theses and dissertations
- Books written by and for researchers

Popular

- News sources and newspapers
- Magazines and other journalistic material
- Primary sources
- Books written for broader audiences (such as novels)
- Trade publications
- Statistical and data publications
- Sources lacking citations

How to tell if a source is scholarly in a library database

- Apply a 'peer-reviewed' filter
- Check the author(s), citations, and publisher
- Plug the source into Ulrichsweb to check if it is peer reviewed (requires VPN - [download it here!](#))
- [Ask a Librarian](#) for help!