Evaluating Periodical Articles

Periodical articles are important to use in research as they contain new information or a new perspective that is not yet available in a book or information that is so specific and narrowly focused that it may never be published in a book. Periodical articles are considered to be "cutting edge" resources as the review and publishing cycle is shorter than that for books. However, not all articles are scholarly. The following questions are designed to assist you in evaluating periodical articles.

Periodical Type:

In what type of periodical was the article published—scholarly, trade, popular, or newspaper?

Who published the periodical?
- Scholarly journals are published by professional organizations, universities, research institutes, and scholarly presses.
- Trade journals are published by professional organizations and commercial or trade publishers.
- Popular magazines are published by commercial or trade publishers.
- Newspapers are published by commercial or trade publishers.

How frequently is the periodical published?
- Scholarly journals are frequently published on bi-monthly or quarterly basis.
- Trade journals are frequently published on a monthly basis.
- Popular magazines are published on a monthly or weekly basis.
- Newspapers are published on a weekly or daily basis.

What does the periodical look like?
- Scholarly journals look and feel more like a book as they are published on plain paper. Scholarly journals usually have no pictures or advertisements. Any graphics are tables or charts which accompany the research articles.
- Trade journals have a glossy cover and may have some pictures and advertisements, particularly for the publisher’s resources.
- Popular magazines are published on glossy paper and have lots of pictures and advertisements.
- Newspapers are published on newsprint and usually have pictures and advertisements

Author:

Who is the author of the information?
- Is the author a researcher or scholar in the field? If so, this may be a scholarly article.
- Is the author employed in the field? If so, the article is probably from a trade journal.
- Is the author a journalist who is not an expert in the field? This article is probably from a popular magazine or newspaper.

Is the author affiliated with an organization?
- Is the organization well-known and reputable?
- Is the organization affiliated with a particular professional organization or a research institution?
- Do other resources refer to this organization and their research?

Is the author referenced in other sources?
- Has your instructor mentioned this author?
- Is this author cited in the bibliography of other resources such as subject reference works, books, or other journal articles?

Does the author have a particular bias?
Content:

What kind of article is it?

• Does the article contain original research or in-depth analysis? Is there an abstract stating what the research shows? These are characteristics of scholarly journal articles.
• Does the article report on current trends or reports from the field? These are characteristics of trade journal articles.
• Does the article report on current events and news? Is the article an interview? These are characteristics of popular magazines.
• Does the article report on current events and news particularly with a local or regional focus? This is a characteristic of newspapers.

Is the information reliable and accurate?

• Can the information be verified?
• Are references provided to other information resources in a bibliography or footnotes?
• Scholarly journals have extensive bibliographies or footnotes.
• Trade journals have briefer bibliographies or footnotes.
• Popular magazines and newspapers rarely cite information.

How does the information compare to other information sources you have used?

• Does it cover a specific aspect of your topic in detail?
• Does it add new information or a different perspective on your topic than other resources?

What type of language and vocabulary is used?

• Scholarly journals use college-level writing, more sophisticated vocabulary, and often use the specialized language of the discipline.
• Trade journals use the specialized language of the discipline.
• Popular magazines use simpler writing and general vocabulary that is understood by most readers.
• Newspapers use simple writing and general vocabulary that is understood by most readers.

How long is the article?

• Scholarly articles are often quite lengthy from 10-30 pages.
• Trade articles are medium length from 3-10 pages.
• Popular magazine articles are shorter from 1-6 pages.
• Newspaper articles are often very short from 1-2 pages.

Currency:

Is the information current?

• What is the date of the article?
• Is this a recent article about new discoveries or perspectives?
• Is this an older article that is frequently cited by other authors or contains important information not available in other sources?

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