Locating Scholarly Articles for Your Research

What is a scholarly article?
When working on research assignments, you will often be required to use scholarly articles as references to support your work. Scholarly articles are published papers created by subject experts within a specific field of study and are used to develop conversations among scholars. These articles are an excellent way to familiarize yourself with the latest research on a topic and can be used to provide evidence to support your own research.

Where do I look for scholarly articles?
Two common places that students look when trying to locate scholarly articles are in library databases and the open web. Library databases are online warehouses of information that contain scholarly research for various subject areas, most of which are not available to the general public. The open web is freely accessible and contains webpages that are searchable through engines such as Google.

Which one should I use?
The following chart provides a comparison of these two resources and what they are best used for:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Library Databases</th>
<th>The Open Web</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currency:</strong> Is the health information current and up-to-date?</td>
<td>• Good – most databases update on a daily or weekly basis, meaning you get the most recent, up-to-date information on a topic</td>
<td>• Mixed – information may be current or it may be out of date; always check for a date stamp (e.g. “last updated on Sept. 1, 2016”)</td>
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<td><strong>Relevance:</strong> Is the health information level appropriate and relevant?</td>
<td>• Good – intended audience is usually health scholars, academics, and researchers; subject-specific databases also narrow the number of results and ensure a health focus</td>
<td>• Mixed – information may be geared towards practitioners, patients, or a general audience; searches can also bring back thousands of results and may not be restricted to health</td>
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<td><strong>Authority:</strong> Who or what is the source of the health information?</td>
<td>• Good – authors or publishers are clearly named and contact information/credentials are usually listed or easily accessible</td>
<td>• Mixed – author information and credentials may or may not be present; it’s also good to always check the website URL (e.g. .com = commercial, .org = non-profit organization)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy:</strong> Is the health information reliable, truthful, and correct in terms of content?</td>
<td>• Good – many scholarly articles undergo a process of peer-review (i.e. a form quality control for what information gets published) and include a list of citations/sources referenced</td>
<td>• Mixed – anyone can publish on the web! Check to see if bias is present in the work or if it presents a range of evidence and views on a topic; make sure references to support evidence are also present</td>
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<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> What is the reason this health information exists?</td>
<td>• Good – purpose is usually explicitly stated, with an objective aim to inform, teach, or critique on a particular topic</td>
<td>• Mixed – purpose may be to inform, to sell, or to persuade; information can be factual or personal opinion</td>
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<td><strong>Useful for:</strong> What function does this resource best serve?</td>
<td>• Locating scholarly articles • Keeping up-to-date with the most recent research in a specific field of study • Example: MEDLINE, a bibliographic database of biomedical literature published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine</td>
<td>• Locating background/supplementary information • Searching for statistics, legislation, or grey literature (information not commercially published, such as government or organizational reports) • Example: The World Health Organization, an agency of the United Nations focused on international public health</td>
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For additional help locating scholarly articles, please see our Health Studies resource guide (http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/healthstudies) or contact your librarian, Sarah Guay (sarah.guay@utoronto.ca).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Professional/Trade</th>
<th>Popular</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>• To inform and report the results of original research/experimentation</td>
<td>• To provide news and information in a particular field or industry</td>
<td>• To report current events, news, and opinions; to entertain or persuade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cover</td>
<td>• Plain covers with limited imagery; maintain a “professional” look</td>
<td>• Glossy covers with illustrations/photos and industry-relevant ads</td>
<td>• Flashy covers; ads are often present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors &amp; Audience</td>
<td>• Experts or professionals in the field, with a scholarly audience in mind</td>
<td>• Industry specialists, practitioners, or educators in the field</td>
<td>• Journalists or professional writers for a general audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length &amp; Language</td>
<td>• Longer articles with scholarly or technical language</td>
<td>• Brief articles with industry jargon</td>
<td>• Short articles with easy-to-understand language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Control</td>
<td>• Peer-review is often (but not always) required prior to publication</td>
<td>• Requires approval of an editorial board; peer-review is not guaranteed</td>
<td>• Peer-review or editorial review are not required for publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>• Include an extensive list of references and sources cited</td>
<td>• Occasionally present in the form of footnotes or short bibliographies</td>
<td>• Usually do not provide full citations or reference lists for sources</td>
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**Scholarly vs. Peer-Reviewed Publications**

Many, but not all, scholarly articles are **peer-reviewed** (also known as “refereed”). This means they have gone through a rigorous review process by a panel of subject experts prior to being published. The easy way to remember the difference is that all peer-reviewed publications are scholarly, but not all scholarly publications are peer-reviewed. If you are unsure which type of source is needed for your assignment, double check with your professor.

**Not sure if something is peer-reviewed?** Look up the journal title in [Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory](http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/peer-review) to check. You can also consult our Peer Review guide ([http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/peer-review](http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/peer-review)) or contact your librarian, Sarah Guay (sarah.guay@utoronto.ca), for additional help.

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