


An important step in writing a term paper or in completing many assignments includes finding information in periodicals. In general, information in **periodicals** is more timely, current, and up-to-date, than information in books. When professors and/or librarians speak of the periodical literature, they may use several different terms, such as, **magazines, serials, or scholarly journals.**

In order to look for the right kind of information in the right places, you first need to understand the assignment. Does your professor want you to look for papers in **scholarly journals**, or will recent articles from substantive, general interest or **popular magazines** be more appropriate? Once you understand the assignment, you need to know how to distinguish one kind of periodical literature from another. Here are some rough guidelines:

- A **serial** or **periodical** is any publication that appears at regular intervals (weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually) and is intended to continue indefinitely. Magazines, journals, newspapers, yearbooks, proceedings, and indexes are all serials.
- **Magazines** are commercial serial publications intended for any of a wide variety of readers. Some magazines provide news and general information to a popular audience, while others are aimed at professionals in various fields.
- **Newspapers** are commercial periodicals that are issued daily, weekly or biweekly, featuring coverage of news and current events as well as opinion and advertising. Newspapers seek to inform, explain, influence and entertain readers. Some papers such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today* or the *Gainesville Sun* target the general public, while others aim for a more defined audience.
- **Journals**, or **scholarly, scientific journals**, are periodicals generally published by an institution, professional association or learned society, and contain articles that disseminate current information on research and developments in particular subject fields. Before an editor of a journal publishes a manuscript, the editor and a team of specialists on the journal editorial board examine the manuscript carefully, to be sure that the article will contribute to the knowledge of the field. Because of the rigorous evaluation process, these publications are also referred to as **refereed** or **peer-reviewed** journals.

Once you have determined the type of publication you wish to use, the next step in your research is to choose the most appropriate database or index to periodicals. Indexes such as *Academic Search Premier* and *OmniFile* cover magazines, newspapers and journals, but allow you to limit your search to peer-reviewed journals if desired. Other databases may cover only certain types of periodicals. For example, the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* indexes approximately 300 popular magazines while *Entomology Abstracts* covers the top 524 journals in the field of entomology.

To determine the type of periodicals a given index or database covers (such as *LexisNexis*), search for the database using the "By Title" search on the **Find Databases** page, (<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/databases.html>). Click on the  icon to see a description of the database.

To find the best index to journals or other periodicals in a given subject area or discipline, consult the **Find Databases**, select, "By Subject," then examine the descriptions of the databases.

Remember that you can also easily consult with a librarian about this entire process without leaving your computer by using *Ask A Librarian IM*, the UF Libraries' instant messaging service (<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/ask/>).

Scholarly, Peer-Reviewed

Purpose: To report on original research or experimentation in order to make such information available to the rest of the scholarly community.

Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. The articles contain mostly text, with many graphs and charts, but few photos. Scholarly journals *always* cite their sources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies.

Articles are written by a scholar in the field or by someone who has done research in the field.

The language of scholarly journals is that of the discipline covered. It assumes some scholarly background on the part of the reader.

Many scholarly journals (but not all) are published by a specific professional organization.

EXAMPLES:

American Anthropologist (Journal of the American Anthropology Association)

JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association

Journal of Marriage and the Family (Published by the National Council on Family Relations)

PMLA (Modern Language Association)

Psychological Bulletin (Published by the American Psychological Association)

Science (Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science)

Popular

Purpose: To entertain the reader, to sell the products of their advertisers, and/or promote a viewpoint.

Popular periodicals come in various formats, but they are usually glossy with colorful, flashy covers and photos intended to entice the readers and buyers at newsstands.

Popular magazines rarely cite sources. The information is often second or third-hand and the original source is sometimes obscure.

Articles are written by staff members or freelance writers.

Articles are usually very short, written in simple language and designed to meet a minimal education level. There is generally little depth to the articles' content.

EXAMPLES:

Cosmopolitan, *Ebony*, *Essence*,

Family Circle, *Mother Earth News*, *Ms.*, *Omni*, *Psychology Today*,

Parents Magazine, *People Weekly*,

Popular Mechanics, *Readers Digest*,

Rolling Stone, *Sports Illustrated*,

USA Today

Still Confused?

Sometimes it is hard to tell if a periodical is scholarly or popular, even after following the tips given in this handout. A periodical directory will give a description of the periodical's publishing history, audience and tell if it is peer-reviewed.

Ulrich's Periodical Directory <http://ulrichsweb.com/>

Newspapers

Purpose: To report news, and cultural events through news analysis and reporting. Papers also feature photographs, weather reports, editorials, essays, personal and syndicated columns, letters to the editors, comic strips, cartoons, advertising and reviews of books, movies and music.

Coverage ranges from national and international (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*) to events of local interest (*Gainesville Sun*, or the *St. Augustine Record*) depending upon the audience for the paper.

Newspapers are typically published daily, twice weekly or once a week, though there are exceptions. Traditional papers are printed on low quality tabloid sized paper, as well as online.

Articles are written by professional journalists.

Newspapers are useful primary sources of information, printing full text of speeches, first hand reports of events, and elusive facts about local issues or events.

EXAMPLES:

Atlanta Journal and Constitution

Miami Herald, *Boston Globe*

Trade & Professional

Purpose: To provide information, in a general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens.

These periodicals may be quite attractive, even glossy, in appearance. Some may be in newspaper format. Articles often have many illustrations, usually photographs.

These periodicals sometimes cite sources but they often do not.

Articles may be written by a scholar, a well-known professional or other expert in the subject addressed in the article. Freelance writers or members of the editorial staff may also contribute articles.

The language of these publications is geared to any educated audience. A certain level of interest and intelligence, though not expertise, is assumed.

Professional and trade magazines report on developments in various fields or industries.

They are generally published by commercial enterprises or individuals, although some emanate from specific professional organizations.

EXAMPLES:

Advertising Age, *Billboard*, *Business*

Week, *Atlantic*, *The Economist*, *Harpers*,

Mother Jones, *The Nation*, *New Scientist*,

New York Times Magazine, *Scientific*

America, *The Smithsonian*, *U.S. News &*

World Report, *Variety*