

Identifying Scholarly Journal Articles

So far we've covered what is a database and how to search it, but there's one more key skill that you will likely need when doing research in a database. Databases contain all sorts of periodical articles: magazines, newspapers and scholarly journals. Most of you are probably familiar with magazines and newspapers: they are written for a general audience and we see these all the time. Scholarly journal articles are quite different from magazines and newspapers, and oftentimes your instructor may require that you use scholarly journal articles as part of your research. This section of the tutorial will show you how to go about finding scholarly articles in the database.

If you have no idea what a scholarly journal article is and would like some more in-depth information, I would suggest taking a look at our tutorial on identifying and finding scholarly journal articles, which can be found on the Research Help page.

You need to be able to identify the characteristics of a scholarly journal article. That way when you find an article using the database you can look at the characteristics of that article to determine whether or not the article comes from a scholarly journal. Looking at the tutorial, I see that the main characteristics of a scholarly journal are as follows:

- Scholarly journal articles contain a bibliography or list of references.
- Scholarly articles are written by scholars or researchers in a particular field.
- Scholarly articles are long and complex, usually longer than 5 pages.
- Scholarly articles use complex language, specific to a field.
- Scholarly articles often contain charts and graphs with data.

Now there is another distinction that you should know about. Scholarly journals contain many different types of articles. You can find letters to the editor, book reviews, review articles and research articles. Oftentimes, your instructor wants you to find empirical research articles in the scholarly journal. Empirical research is when the researchers come up with some sort of question or hypothesis to test, and then the test that hypothesis and report the findings. Empirical research articles follow a very specific structure:

1. **Background:** provides an overview of the topic.
2. **Method:** details how the experiment was conducted.
3. **Results:** shows the data that the researchers collected.
4. **Discussion:** provides an interpretation of the results.
5. **References:** lists other work read or considered during the research.

So there are a lot of things to be looking for when you are trying to identify scholarly journal articles. There are ways to search the database so that you are more likely to find scholarly journal articles, so let's try that now.

We're going to go into EBSCOhost and I'm going to use Academic Search Complete. This takes us to the search screen. Now there are two ways to approach this. We can either do a regular search and then look through the results to identify which are scholarly journal articles or we can do a more targeted search and hope that we only get scholarly journal articles. It's up to you which you think will work for you.

So let's start with a regular search that we've already used:
insomnia AND students AND treatment.

To determine which are items in your results list are scholarly articles, we need to look at the full text of the article and determine the length of the article, who is the author, is there a bibliography and so on.

Let's look at the first article. It's from Sleep and Hypnosis and the article is 7 pages long. It says the author works at Central Michigan University. Open the full text article and we'll scroll down to see if there is a bibliography or list of references: there is. I also notice as I scroll through the article that there are sections titled Method, Results, and Discussion. Looking at the criteria we discussed, this is from a scholarly journal, and more specifically it is an empirical research article. We lucked out with the first article.

Looking through the rest of the results, most of these articles are quite long, so I'm thinking that nearly all that we found are scholarly articles. Wait, #6 is from Forbes. I can buy Forbes at the grocery store, so that's often a sign that it is a magazine rather than a scholarly journal. The article is 2 pages long, too short really to be a scholarly article. There's no information about the author, which leads me to believe that the author is a journalist rather than a researcher at a university. I look at the full text of the article and there's no bibliography, so this one doesn't have any of the characteristics we are looking for. This article is not from a scholarly journal!

There's another way to identify scholarly articles when you've done a general search: by using source type. Over on the left hand of the screen there are the different source types. For this search the results are from Academic Journals (Scholarly Journals) and Magazines. If we click on Academic Journals, the results will be articles that come from scholarly publications. Now keep in mind that this may include book reviews and letters to the editor, but this generally works fairly well.

That's one way to approach the search, the other is to target your search from the beginning using limits. There are characteristics that we know about a scholarly journal article that can help. For example, we can limit the search to articles that are longer than 4 pages, which means that most newspaper and magazine articles will be excluded. We can also limit to articles that have reference available (a bibliography). It's extremely rare to find a magazine or newspaper article with a bibliography. It can happen, but it's pretty rare! You could limit to articles from scholarly journals. You would still get book reviews from scholarly journals, but that's a good option, too. I'm going to limit to scholarly journals, and see what I get. Ok I found 9. 9 of the 11 that I originally found were published in scholarly journals. I'd still need to verify that each article meets the criteria we discussed (lengthy article, bibliography, etc.) but this is a good way to quickly narrow down to a workable list.

Hopefully this section was helpful. Please remember that at any time that you need help, we'd be happy to answer any questions that you have. Our contact information is at the beginning and the end of this tutorial.

