

Distinguishing Source Types

Purpose



Scholarly: To share research findings with the larger academic community.

Popular: To provide information in a general manner to the public.

Trade: To deliver industry-specific information, including news, statistics, and trends to practitioners in a specific trade or field.

Author



Scholarly: Usually a researcher or academic scholar (i.e., professor) who is an expert in the subject area. The author's affiliation, including university, research center, or academic credential (Ph.D., M.S.), is usually given.

Popular: Reporters or freelance writers who may or may not have academic expertise in the subject matter. Author's affiliation is generally not given.

Trade: Staff editors, journalists, practitioners, or academics in the field. Author's affiliation may be given.

Audience



Scholarly: Academic faculty, professionals, researchers, and students.

Popular: General public.

Trade: People who work in and are affiliated with a particular industry or field.

Language



Scholarly: Use of jargon/specialized vocabulary related to subject area. Authors assume readers have preexisting knowledge of the subject matter.

Popular: Simple, everyday language; layman's terms.

Trade: May use some jargon/specialized vocabulary. Generally, use simple, everyday language. Basic knowledge of the subject matter usually assumed.

Appearance/Organization



Scholarly: Articles may follow a predictable structure (abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, results, analysis/discussion, conclusion, and references).

Popular: Often slick and attractive in appearance; may tell a story using narrative; often contain a lot of pictures or advertisements.

Trade: Often slick and attractive in appearance; usually contain a lot of pictures and advertisements targeted to the specific trade or field.

Information Checking



Scholarly: Content is typically reviewed by several experts or editorial board in the subject area (peer review) to ensure accuracy and research quality.

Popular: Content may be selected by editors employed by the publisher or organization or have no formal review process established.

Trade: Content is usually selected by editors employed by the publisher or organization.

Location of Information



Scholarly: Academic and research libraries, other medical, scientific, and research settings. Online in academic databases or at publisher websites, usually requesting payment or a password for access.

Popular: Newsstands, grocery stores, airport bookstores. Some are searchable in library databases.

Trade: Often mailed to members of professional organizations and/or available online. Some are searchable in library databases.

(TIP! Always start at the UNLV Libraries website or set up Library Links in Google Scholar to avoid paying!)

References & Bibliography



Scholarly: Has both. Lists the sources where quotes and information originated. Can be verified.

Popular: May have one or the other or neither. They may not be able to be verified.

Trade: May have one or the other or neither. Generally, have less than scholarly sources. Can often be verified.