

Student Success Tools

The Differences between Peer-Reviewed and Popular Magazines

“After review, the play has been ruled...”

If you've ever watched a televised sporting event, you may have heard a game referee use the words above, after a controversial call. The referee is the expert who makes sure the teams play fairly, responsibly, and according to the rules. Publications can have referees, too. Most often, scholarly magazines that focus on a particular subject of study or research give their content to a special expert review board of peers, or referees that reviews articles to be sure the information meets the highest standard of accuracy and timeliness.

Peer-reviewed/Refereed journals contain a section that describes the selection process, the organization behind the journal, and details the process to submit a paper or article for review. They usually have covers that appear studious and official, but no flashy photographs, advertisements or headlines; and they usually won't appear on a local newsstand.

This quote sums things up nicely. *“A refereed source is one in which information is published only after it's been reviewed by several other experts in that subject area. Many scholarly journals follow this procedure... Rigorous review of published research... assures you... of acceptable and scholarly information.”* Carla List, *Introduction to Library Research*, 2nd ed., College Custom Series (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) 83.

“Extra, Extra! Read all about it!”

Articles in a popular magazine, on the other hand, don't go through an expert referee. They usually cover a variety of subjects, and are approved by an editor who may not have deep knowledge of an article subject. Scholars usually don't write and submit the popular magazine articles for approval. Reporters on the magazine staff do. Magazine covers feature photographs, articles are shorter, contain varied and general information, with catchy headlines. Popular magazines also contain many pages of advertising. Magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *People*, and *Sports Illustrated* fit this category.

The following web site has a chart that explains the differences very well:

<http://www.library.wvu.edu/ref/howtoguides/scholarlyvpopularjournals.html>

When using a database for research, then, it is important to know where to find the most reliable information to make your reports, essays, and projects accurate. Big Internet search engines like Google™, Yahoo!® or Dogpile® are super fast, but the lists of Web sites or Web articles don't go through an expert review process before they are listed. You have to check each one very carefully. What seems to be factual information, might just be a simple, uninformed opinion, and nothing more. Library databases offer different kinds of information, and the best of them let you search for peer-reviewed/refereed information, or popular magazine articles. Using peer-reviewed articles will guarantee your facts with expert sources.