

Evidence-Based Practice

Navigating Through the Myriad of Available Journals

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Article Outline

6 In reading journals, it is often difficult to differentiate what is considered “scholarly,” what
may be viewed as “respected,” and what information should be considered “suspect.” The
purpose of this article is to shed light on what process journals have in place to ensure that
9 scholarly articles are written with correct information, by a reputable source. With the
myriad of nursing journals available both in print and online, it is important to be able to
sift through the information and determine what is considered relevant, worthwhile
information.

12 In determining what is scholarly, it is first important to decide what that term implies.
Scholarly is concerned with academic study, especially research studies; it exhibits the
methods and attitudes of a scholar; and it has the meaning and appearance of a scholar.¹

15 Scholarly journals have the purpose of reporting the results of recently concluded research
projects and sharing, with interested persons, new ideas in the area.² The appearance of a
scholarly journal is usually one in which the articles are printed with one column to a page,
18 as in a book. There are few illustrations, and these are usually graphs or charts referring to
specific points in the article.² For a scholarly journal, the articles have received the approval
of members of the editorial board of that specific journal. Generally, these are scholars who
21 are considered experts in the specific subject, with the editorial board ensuring that all
articles that are published in the journal are reliable, well-written, and documented.² The
language of a specific scholarly journal is that of the discipline that it covers, and it
24 assumes that the reader has some scholarly background on the subject matter.¹

In many journals the articles may be considered “peer reviewed” or “refereed.” Peer review
is a process used by journals that ensures that the articles published in a specific journal
27 represent the best scholarship that is currently considered available.³ Peer review is an
indicator that the article can be considered of high quality. In this process an author's peers
read a manuscript that has been submitted for publication. A number of recognized experts
30 in the field will evaluate the manuscript and recommend that it be published, revised, or
rejected. Articles that are accepted for publication are implied to have met the standards of
the discipline's expertise.⁴

33 In some scholarly and professional journals, articles may not be “peer reviewed” but rather
are selected by the editor or a board. Although standards of scholarship in such journals are
often equal or comparable to those of peer-reviewed journals, this may not always be the
36 case.⁴ To determine whether a journal is peer reviewed, “Ulrich's Periodical Directory
Online” can help determine whether this journal fits the criteria. The title of the journal can
be typed in the text box and submitted, and a report will be received. This report will
39 indicate whether the journal contains articles that are peer reviewed or, as called by Ulrich,
“refereed.”³

A “review article” is not to be confused with a “peer-reviewed journal.” In essence, review
42 articles consist of any effort by one or more writers to sum up what is considered to be the
current state of research on a specific topic. The article's author will search for everything
considered relevant to the topic, sort the information, and then present it in a coherent
45 “state-of-the-art” article.³

Review articles will give valuable information about the important and relevant persons working in a specific field, major advances and discoveries, significant and important gaps in the current literature, current debates, and an indication of where future research may lead.³ Unlike a research article, a review article will give a good idea of the basic ideas of a topic. Research articles are more advanced methods of finding the most recent “cutting-edge” research, as well as authoritative information about older research. To reiterate, review articles are basic summaries and a general introduction to a topic, whereas research articles will usually contain an “abstract,” a description of research, results obtained, and the significance of these results.³

Other types of articles are also available both online and in print. The reliability of articles obtained in some journals or magazines should be viewed with a discerning eye. For example, general-interest periodicals contain articles that are attractive in appearance, with many illustrations, such as photographs. These periodicals may sometimes cite their sources but often do not.¹ The authors of these articles may be members of an editorial staff, scholars, or freelance writers. The audience is generally that of an educated public, with no specialty assumed, and the purpose is to provide information in a general manner, to a broad audience.¹

Popular periodicals come in many formats, contain many photographs, and have articles that are short, written in simple language, and designed to meet a level of education that may be considered minimal. These articles are often simple and contain little depth. The main purpose of these periodicals is to sell products or to promote a specific view.¹

Finally, there is the sensational periodical, which comes in many styles, but most commonly a newspaper format. The purpose of the articles in these periodicals is to cater to superstitions or arouse curiosity about a sensationalized news event. Obviously, these periodicals are often considered inflammatory and assume a certain gullibility in the audience. The outrageous headlines are designed to astonish and oftentimes offend the audience.¹

This review of the different types of journals, periodicals, and articles available will hopefully give the reader a better idea of sources that can be considered trustworthy and those that should be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. With the advent of so much information available from such a broad variety of sources, it serves the reader well to read with a discerning eye.

References

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