Journals, magazines, and newspapers are often called periodicals. They are important resources for up-to-date information in all disciplines. In general, the term “journal” is used for scholarly publications while the term “magazine” implies popular publications. With a collection of journals, magazines, and newspapers as large and diverse as the CMU libraries’, it is often difficult to distinguish among the various levels of scholarship found in the periodicals. In this guide, there are four categories of periodical literature:

1. Scholarly
2. Substantive news or general interest (including trade journals and trade newspapers)
3. Popular
4. Sensational

Remembering that none of the lines drawn between types of periodicals can ever be totally clear-cut, it can generally be said that the distinguishing criteria are as follows:

**SCHOLARLY**

Scholarly journals generally have a sober, serious look. They often contain many graphs and charts, and rarely have glossy pages or exciting pictures.

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.

Articles usually begin with an abstract (a short summary of the contents of the article).

The language used in scholarly journals is that of the discipline involved. Some scholarly background on the part of the reader is assumed.

The main purpose of a scholarly journal is to report on original research or experimentation in order to make this information available to the rest of the scholarly world.

Many scholarly journals, though by no means all, are published by professional organizations.

**EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS:**

- JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association
- Psychological Bulletin (published by the American Psychological Association)
- Journal of Marriage and the Family (published by the National Council on Family Relations)
- Journal of Youth and Adolescence

**SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST (including TRADE periodicals)**

These periodicals may be very attractive in appearance; some are in newspaper format. Articles often have numerous illustrations and frequently have photographs.

News and general interest periodicals sometimes cite sources, though more often they do not.

Articles may be written by a member of the editorial staff, a scholar, or a free-lance writer.

The language used is geared to an educated audience, but no specialty is assumed, only interested and a certain level of intelligence.

These periodicals are generally published by commercial enterprises or individuals.

The main purpose of periodicals in this category is to provide information, in general manner, to a broad audience of concerned citizens.

**EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE NEWS OR GENERAL INTEREST PERIODICALS:**

- Business Week
- Time
- Psychology Today
- The New Yorker
- Psychology Today

The main purpose of trade journals and trade newspaper is to keep practitioners in a specific field abreast of current developments in the field.

**EXAMPLES OF TRADE PERIODICALS:**

- Publishers Weekly
- Nation’s Restaurant News
- WWD (Women’s Wear Daily)
POPULAR

Popular periodicals come in many formats, and are often attractive and somewhat slick in appearance, with lots of graphics (photographs, drawings, etc.).

These publications rarely, if ever, cite sources. Information published in such periodicals is often second- or third-hand, and the original source is sometimes obscure.

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

Articles are written by staff members or free-lance writers.

The main purposes of popular periodicals are to entertain the reader, to sell products, and/or to promote a viewpoint.

EXAMPLES OF POPULAR PERIODICALS:

- Sports Illustrated
- Parents Magazine
- People Weekly
- Reader’s Digest
- Family Circle

SENSATIONAL

Sensational periodicals come in a variety of styles, but often employ a newspaper format.

The language used is elementary and occasionally sensational or inflammatory. These periodicals assume a certain gullibility on the part of their readers.

The main purpose of sensational periodicals seems to be to arouse curiosity and to cater to popular superstitions. This is often accomplished with flashy headlines designed to astonish (e.g. “Half-man Half-woman Makes Self Pregnant”).

EXAMPLES OF SENSATIONAL PERIODICALS:

- National Enquirer
- Star
- Weekly World News
- Cosmopolitan

NOTE:

There are reference books which attempt to describe and evaluate periodical titles. If you need further information about an individual periodical title, try consulting the following reference source (kept at the Reference Desk):


“…an annotated listing by subject of nearly 7,000 periodicals” (Preface). Each entry gives name of periodical, beginning publication date, publisher, editor, address, price, and such information as indexing and level of audience. Short abstracts describe the scope, political slant, and other aspects of the periodical. Arrangement is topical which brings journals and magazines on like subjects together. To find an individual title, use the title index at the end of the volume.

For further information or assistance, ask at the Reference Desk.