

LUC WRITING CENTER – “DEFINING SCHOLARLY SOURCES”

What is a Scholarly Source?

Scholarly sources are sources that have been peer reviewed and are published in a recognized scholarly or academic source. They typically include evidence to back up their claims and provide citations or outside sources for more information. Often, they are written by experts in academic or professional fields and use academic or professional language. Scholarly sources are intended for academic or professional audiences.

How to Determine if a Source is Scholarly:

- Is the source published by a scholarly association, scholarly society, a university, or a recognized scholarly publisher?
- Is the source peer-reviewed?
- Is the source intended for an academic or professional audience?
- Does the source include evidence and provide citations?

What Other Types of Sources are There?

- Non-scholarly sources are called *popular sources*.
- Popular sources are NOT peer reviewed by experts before publication. They may or may not be fact-checked.
- Popular sources can be published in any format or venue, e.g., general websites, YouTube videos, magazines, newspapers.
- Popular sources generally do not provide citations or evidence for their claims.
- Popular sources can be written by anyone, generally non-academics or professionals on a public forum such as Facebook, Twitter, or Reddit, and do not use technical language.
- Popular sources are intended for everyone, not just academic or professional audiences. Be very careful how you use popular sources, as they are not reliable. However, if you were doing a project examining popular opinion on online forums prior to and after a certain political event, for instance, you could cite these sources and discuss their meaning.

On the next page you can see a chart that will help you determine whether a source is scholarly or popular.

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Is it a Scholarly or Popular Source?*

	SCHOLARLY Source	POPULAR Source
AUDIENCE	Scholarly readers (professors, researchers, students) familiar with the language of the field	General population with non-technical background
PURPOSE	To make original research available to the scholarly world	To provide general information that is either informative or entertaining
AUTHOR	Experts in the field with their credentials identified	Staff or free-lance writers; occasionally scholarly writers
SOURCES	Bibliography of cited sources documenting the research	No bibliography; names of reports or references may be mentioned in the text
PUBLICATION CRITERIA	Peer-reviewed or Refereed	No specific criteria
FORMAT	Generally follows a structure including abstract, methodology, results, conclusion, bibliography	No specific format or structure
APPEARANCE	Usually the same for all articles, minimal advertising, little or no color, graphics used to support text	Varied formats, lots of advertising, lots of glossy color; graphics used to enhance articles

*Adapted from St. Mary's College Library