Is it scholarly? Distinguishing periodical types online

Many of the articles you locate will likely be in an online full-text format. Determining the periodical type of these can be difficult, as you do not have the entire periodical to look through for hints. The following tips can help you determine whether a periodical is a popular magazine, trade publication, or scholarly journal.

**Source Title**
- Don’t let the word Journal influence your decision too strongly. Although the word Journal is often an indicator of a scholarly publication, it doesn’t guarantee it. (Think in particular of Ladies Home Journal, a popular magazine.)
- Does the title indicate the periodical is geared toward a very specific and limited audience? These titles are often trade publications and contain information that will assist practitioners in a given field learn more about their work. For example, Social Studies Teacher and American School Board Journal are both geared toward very specific audiences, as their titles indicate.

**Publication Frequency**
- Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall - Scholarly publications often have a quarterly publication frequency, so those items that indicate an issue as Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall will most likely be scholarly journals.
- Weekly publication date - An indicator that a publication is probably not a scholarly journal would be a publication date that includes a month, date and year. For example: March 4, 2002 or 11/25/2004. A date that appears in this manner generally indicates a periodical that is published on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, which is rarely characteristic of a scholarly journal.

**Article Length**
- Scholarly journal articles are longer. Articles in scholarly journals, particularly research articles, will often be in excess of ten pages. Although there may be articles in scholarly journals that are one to two pages, these tend to be news releases or book reviews, and would not be the type of article you would use in a research essay.
- Professional/trade publication articles vary in length. Articles in trade publications have varying lengths, some will be longer research articles, but others may be very short.
- Popular magazine articles are shortest. Articles in popular magazines tend to be short (under five pages).

**Authors**
- Are author names listed? If there is no author’s name it is likely a popular magazine.
- Are there multiple authors? Often articles in scholarly journals will include a group of authors.
- Are author credentials included? (i.e. PhD or MD) Consistent use of credential indicates the likelihood it is a scholarly journal. The inclusion of credentials for some, but not all, articles indicates it is probably a professional publication.

**Supplementary Items**
- Charts, graphs, tables - Does the record indicate there are supplementary items such as charts, tables or graphs included? The presence of these items will often indicate scholarly journal articles, particularly if there are multiples of such items.
- Photographs - Does the record indicate there are photographs included? Photographs are most frequently included in popular and trade publications.
Remember there are different types of periodical articles:

- Original research articles
  - Experiment (laboratory or field)
  - Case study
  - Content or textual analysis
  - Literary or art criticism
  - Statistical analysis or survey
  - Ethnography or participant observation
  - Interview
- Opinion essays
- Review articles
- Book reviews
- Letters to editor and editorials
- Short communications (i.e. news items)

Keep in mind the basic structure of scholarly research articles no matter what format (online, print, microfilm, etc) they are in:

- Citation and bibliographic information
- Author’s credentials
- Abstract
- Literature review / Introduction
- Methodology / Analysis
- Results / Examples
- Significance / Discussion / Implications
- Conclusion
- References