

# A Typology of Sources

## The Research Process...

...will bring you into contact with several kinds of sources.

This guide is designed to help you identify the sources you are working with and contextualize the evidence and information you draw from these sources.

In this guide, you will learn about:

- reference sources
- popular press sources
- trade publications
- “parascholarly” publications
- scholarly press sources

### Aren't There Other Kinds of Sources?

Of course. Any typology of the wide variety of materials you might use as sources necessarily simplifies the research process.

Additionally, this guide suggests some of the ways you might use these kinds of sources, but you may find other uses for these sources in your research process: let your research question lead you to a research method that makes sense.

# Descriptions

Reference Sources	You will frequently use encyclopedias and dictionaries as reference sources. While you are probably familiar with general purpose reference sources like Webster's Dictionary or Wikipedia, keep in mind that there are highly specialized reference sources for different professions, disciplines, and fields. These specialized reference sources are indispensable in the early stages of the research process.
Popular Press	These are magazines, newspapers, and books intended to inform or entertain general audiences. They sometimes feature lavish illustrations, rarely include citations, and, in the case of periodicals, often include many advertisements.
Trade Publications	Many industries, businesses, or organizations have one or more publications which address practical concerns of people in the profession. This may include news specific to the profession, reports on major developments in the field, targeted advertising, or information about new technologies, regulations, or changes in the field. Trade periodicals often use the specialized vocabulary of the profession they serve.
"Parascholarly"	"Parascholarly" is a coined term to indicate a genre of article or report that has all of the trappings of a scholarly research report or study, but is published at the behest of an interest group, NGO, think tank, for-profit research organization, Federal Advisory Committee, government commission, or one of several influential ideologically-driven organizations.
Scholarly Press	Scholarly articles are articles written by academics or scholars for an audience of other academics or scholars. These articles usually report the findings of a study or research project in a way that contributes to an ongoing debate, fills a gap in the knowledge on a topic, or intervenes by pointing out limitations to what scholars knew before.

# Examples

Reference Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Oxford English Dictionary</li> <li>- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Ed (DSM-V)</li> <li>- The Encyclopedia of Ecology and Environmental Management</li> <li>- Physician's Desk Reference</li> <li>- The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures</li> <li>- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</li> </ul>	
Popular Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Money</li> <li>- The New York Times</li> <li>- The Washington Post</li> <li>- Discover</li> <li>- Smithsonian</li> <li>- Popular Science</li> <li>- Forbes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time Magazine</li> <li>- The Wall Street Journal</li> <li>- Psychology Today</li> <li>- Atlantic</li> <li>- National Geographic</li> <li>- Smithsonian</li> <li>- Wired</li> </ul>
Trade Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- APA Monitor</li> <li>- Communication Arts</li> <li>- College &amp; Research Library News</li> <li>- Museums Journal</li> <li>- Chemistry World</li> <li>- Construction Equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mathematics Teacher</li> <li>- Columbia Journalism Review</li> <li>- Bar Journal</li> <li>- Chronicle of Higher Education</li> <li>- Advertising Age</li> </ul>
"Parascholarly"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reports and studies published by the Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, RAND Corporation, Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Center for American Progress, Cato Institute, New America Foundation, Polaris Project, New America Foundation, ACLU, etc.</li> <li>- Government reports on original research and reviews of scholarly literature.</li> </ul>	
Scholarly Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural Anthropology</li> <li>- Journal of Health and Social Behavior</li> <li>- Journal of Applied Psychology</li> <li>- Journal of Economic Literature</li> <li>- Journal of American History</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Journal of the American Chemical Society</li> <li>- Communication, Culture, and Critique</li> <li>- Journal of the American Medical Association</li> </ul>

# Author, Audience, Purpose

Reference Sources	Authors are often experts or scholars, but sometimes entries may be written by paid professional writers contracted by the publisher. While it is easy to think of examples of reference sources written for general audiences like Wikipedia or Webster's Dictionary, specialized reference sources are used by scholars, professionals, and students. The purpose of these sources is usually to inform audiences by summarizing and distilling a large number of complex topics within a single resource.
Popular Press	Authors are usually journalists and paid professional writers. Mass market periodicals and books tend to address broad audiences, but many popular press sources address a specific demographic or marketing niche. The purpose of these sources is usually to entertain and inform while maintaining profitability by selling advertising space.
Trade Publications	Authors of trade publications include journalists, paid professional writers, marketers, industry insiders and spokespeople. The audiences addressed are typically professionals working for the covered business, industry, or organization. The purpose of trade publications is generally to inform professionals about new developments in their field; in addition, trade publications often offer a platform for narrowly targetted advertising. In some trade publications, it can be difficult to differentiate between advertising and content.
"Parascholarly"	Authors of "parascholarly" reports, studies, and publications vary considerably. Many are, in fact, experts and scholars, who may or may not be paid for their contributions. Other authors may include paid consultants, government officials and appointees, lobbyists, or organization representatives. The intended audiences for these reports vary, but often include policymakers, government contractors, and scholars or experts. Parascholarly literature often mobilizes a scholarly apparatus in the service of persuasive goal. The advancement of knowledge about a topic is usually one of several considerations and may, in many cases, be subordinated to ideological, political, or institutional objectives.
Scholarly Press	Scholarly publications are the primary way that scholars and experts communicate the findings of their research to other scholars and experts. Authors of scholarly journal articles are almost never paid and authors of scholarly books and monographs usually earn an inconsequential amount of money in the form of royalties, if they earn any at all. Publication is usually understood to be a service to a community of inquiry and is rewarded primarily with prestige within that community. They provide a venue fo scholarly conversations about emerging knowledge. The primary purpose of such publications is the advancement of such knowledge, though scholarly publications are sometimes differentiated from each other by particular editorial biases or inclinations.

# Reliability

## Reference Sources

Reference sources generally try to fact-check their articles and sometimes include some kind of informal peer review process. Since they distill huge bodies of scholarship into shorter articles, they are not as reliable or nuanced as the underlying scholarship.

## Popular Press

Popular press sources are often the first source of information on a topic, making them valuable in the research process. Even so, the standards for fact-checking, journalistic ethics, fairness, and balance vary considerably between publications and over time. Generally, there is some kind of editorial process, but errors, misrepresentations, and outright fraud are surprisingly common.

## Trade Publications

Trade journals are often published as a form of marketing or targeted advertising and usually reflect the norms, biases, or ideologies which circulate within a given profession. Even so, they often include insider accounts or representation of a profession and its practices.

## "Parascholarly"

Some parascholarly sources go through a peer review process, but the quality of this process is sometimes diminished when those reviewing articles have homogenous interests. There is usually an editorial board and/or official process of approval for such publications, but findings which go against the interests of the funding/publishing organization may be suppressed. Articles are often well-documented with a literature review and extensive citations, but the claims are sometimes biased and often shaped by their institutional context. These sources can be very useful but require vigilant background research and critical attention.

## Scholarly Press

The peer review process is designed to ensure the quality of published scholarly work. Additionally, scholars are expected to provide a critical apparatus which includes a literature review, extensive citations, and a thorough demonstration of all claims. Scholars are expected to use appropriate evidence generated and processed using a well-designed and transparently documented research method. Additionally, scholars are expected to adhere to institutionalized ethical norms.

# Typical Uses in the Research Process

Reference Sources	You will first use reference sources when exploring, selecting, and refining your topic. You may also find reference sources useful when you are developing a list of keywords. At this stage, be sure to develop a broad understanding of the context and background of your topic or question so that you can frame a sophisticated preliminary question. This background information will also help you develop the tacit knowledge you will need to begin making sense of scholarly sources. Later in the research process, reference sources will be a valuable tool for looking up terms and concepts you encounter in the scholarly literature.
Popular Press	Popular press sources can inspire you to explore new topics. They can also give you background information about a topic or question. For some current events on which there are few scholarly articles, popular press articles may be the primary source of information; in this case, you should use the scholarly literature to identify theories, methods, and a body research on similar phenomena which will help you make sense of the evidence in the popular press literature. You can also use popular press sources as primary sources which document history or which demonstrate the way that mass media represent a phenomenon.
Trade Publications	Trade journals can sometimes give you insight in the particular jargon or terminology used by professionals in a field. This can be helpful when gathering a list of keywords for future searches. Trade journals can also help you understand how the state of scholarly knowledge affects everyday practical concerns in the field. Occasionally, trade journals can be primary sources, especially when you are interested in professional practices.
"Parascholarly"	Some government reports and studies published by think tanks, NGOs, and government commissions are of a very high quality, but they require a vigilant critical eye, since they often represent a single perspective that is narrowly circumscribed by institutional context or by ideological orientation. You will usually want to put any evidence drawn from such sources in context by discussing the stake that the funding/publishing organization has in the findings.
Scholarly Press	For most University-level research, the peer reviewed scholarly literature will be most important. The credibility of the authors and assurance of reliability offered by the peer review process observed by most scholarly journals make these good sources on which to base your research. You should, of course, carefully analyze the relationships between research questions or hypotheses, methods, evidence, and findings. Using these sources, you can find evidence relevant to your research question, theories that help you understand your topic, and examples of research methods that will help you shape your own research project.

# Identification Tips

## Reference Sources

- 1 Publication type: often available in huge many-page or many-volume printed collections or using online an interface that explicitly identifies the source as an "Encyclopedia," "Dictionary," "Reference Guide," etc.
- 1 Genre: the writing is usually very economical, packing as much information as possible into the shortest space. Articles usually proceed from general to specific and vary in length considerably from one reference source to another.
- 1 Language: clear, accessible language is the norm, but more specialized reference sources may be written for specialized audiences with some mastery over the jargon or terminology of the field.
- 1 Editorial oversight or peer review: the extent and nature of editorial oversight and peer review differs considerably from one reference source to another.

## Popular Press

- 1 Publication type: printed popular press magazines often have glossy pages and/or many full-color illustrations, while printed newspapers do not. Magazines and newspapers often have many advertisements for products not directly related to the content, though popular press books rarely include advertisements.
- 1 Genre: the writing is often more informal than in scholarly writing; there are rarely citations or references in magazines and newspaper and sometimes limited citations in popular press books. Popular press publications rarely provide a formal report on original research and consequently lack a thorough literature review, methods section, etc.
- 1 Language: usually written in language accessible to a broad audience.
- 1 Editorial oversight: publishing houses and editors build their audiences based on reputation, but oversight is often less rigid than in other genres. In the case of journalism, there is often a group of fact-checkers who take the articles apart piece-by-piece, but this is not a foolproof method, especially if the journalist has been sloppy or fraudulent. Some publishers make information about this process public, so it can help you identify popular press sources.

## Trade Publications

- 1 Publication name: trade journals usually clearly identify the profession they address in the title.
- 1 Publication type: printed trade journals often have glossy pages and/or many full-color illustrations; they generally have advertisements relevant to professionals in the field
- 1 Genre: the writing is often more informal than in scholarly writing; there may be citations or references, but there are generally fewer than in scholarly writing. The articles rarely provide a formal report on original research and consequently lack a thorough literature review, methods section, etc.
- 1 Language: often written in language specific to professionals in the field.
- 1 Editorial oversight: Usually the main consideration of editors for trade journals is whether an article will be of interest to professionals in the field. There is some variation in this, however. You can often find out about the editorial process by googling the publication.

## "Parascholarly"

- 1 Publication name: unlike scholarly journal articles, parascholarly literature is not usually published in journals. That said, there are a number of journals published by political or ideological interest groups that specialize in propagating only one kind of message.
- 1 First Page: many parascholarly reports and studies include a cover page that identifies the organization sponsoring the report or the entity to whom the report was submitted.
- 1 Genre: many parascholarly articles and reports will follow the genre conventions of scholarly literature.
- 1 Language: often written in language specific to scholars and/or professionals in the field.
- 1 Peer review, editorial oversight, or report approval process: You can usually determine from indicators in the report itself, on the issuing agency or organization's website, or through a Google search what kind of review, editorial oversight, or report approval process may (or may not) have occurred. This is information you will need to contextualize the information in the report.

## Scholarly Press

- 1 Publication name: many scholarly journals are called "Journal of..."
- 1 Publication type: printed scholarly journals rarely have glossy pages and usually have few full-color illustrations; they generally have few advertisements
- 1 Bibliographic Information: scholarly journals usually have issue and volume numbers; page numbers usually start at the beginning of the volume, rather than the beginning of the issue.
- 1 Genre: most scholarly articles will have several of these features: abstract, keywords, literature review, extensive citations to other sources, methods section, theory section, findings/results section and/or a body with substantial analysis of some primary text(s), a conclusion, a references section.
- 1 Language: written in academic language specific to the field.
- 1 Peer review: check the UlrichsWeb database to see if your periodical is refereed and has its content type listed as "Academic /Scholarly". If it does not appear in Ulrich's, try googling the journal title. On the publisher's website, look at the about page or submission guidelines for information about the peer review or refereeing process

# Finding Sources

Reference Sources	One good way to access specialized reference sources is using <a href="#">literati</a> database, but there are also print copies of many such reference sources in both University and public libraries.
Popular Press	The Lexis Nexis Academic database is great for finding newspaper articles. ProQuest Research Library can be good for newspaper or magazine articles. Many popular press periodicals have a web presence and popular press books are often available in libraries or bookstores.
Trade Publications	Subject-, field-, and discipline-specific databases like EBSCO Business Source Complete often provide trade sources alongside popular press and scholarly sources. You can find the names of publications associated with a specific organization using the Encyclopedia of Associations in the library.
"Parascholarly"	These frequently appear in Google and Google Scholar searches. They are also usually easily searchable on the websites of sponsoring organizations or government agencies. You might find them mentioned in popular press articles on your topic. Particularly high-profile reports of this nature will be cited in some scholarly literature.
Scholarly Press	General purpose databases like EBSCO Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Research Library, and JSTOR are a good place to start. Once you have a few articles, one great way to find more relevant scholarly articles is through the citations found in these articles. Later, you might try more specialized tools like APA PsycNET, MLA International Bibliography, or MathSciNET. There are also many subject-specific EBSCO and ProQuest databases you should explore after you have exhausted the general