Evaluating Journal Articles

To evaluate journal articles for use in your research, ask yourself the following questions. Then compare your answers to our chart “Popular Magazines, Scholarly Journals, and Trade Publications.” For college-level papers, information should be obtained mostly from scholarly publications.

Purpose of Article:
- Why was the article written?
- What is the author’s purpose? To argue? To persuade? To prove?

Appearance of Journal:
- What does the journal cover look like?
- Do articles have titles and subtitles?
- Are there abstracts included with articles?
- Is there a table of contents?
- Are author credentials listed?

Organization and Content:
- Is the material organized and focused?
- Is the argument or presentation understandable?
- Does the article discuss original research?
- Is data provided on studies or research findings?

Bias:
- Does the publication appear to be politically oriented?
- Who publishes the journal? Is it a company, an organization, or a publishing house?
- If the article presents an argument, does it represent both sides equally or acknowledge opposing viewpoints?

Timeliness:
- How old is the article? For fields in disciplines like the health sciences, age of the resource matters.
- Is the data or statistics in the article likely to change?

Citations:
- Is there a formal bibliography or just a list of further reading/resources?
- How long is the bibliography?
- What type of resources does the author use? Are they general in nature (like encyclopedias) or more specific (like journal articles)?
- How old are the resources the author uses?
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- Is there a clear and consistent citation style?

Usefulness to Your Research Needs:

- Is the article relevant to your research topic?
- Does the article support an argument?
- Does the article refute (disprove) an argument?
- Are there examples in the article that help to support/refute a particular point of view?
- Is information and statistical data in this resource consistent with other resources? Is the information in the resource correct?

Authority:

- Who wrote the article?
- Is the author an expert in his/her field?
- Where is the author employed?
- What educational background does the author have?
- What else has been written by this author?
- Has the author won any awards or received any honors?

Coverage:

- Does the article summarize the topic?
- Does the article cover only one aspect of the argument?
- Does the article provide a comprehensive view of the topic?
- When you finish reading the article, are any questions left unanswered?

Audience:

- For what type of reader is the article written?
- Would “average” readers be able to understand the terminology within the article?
- Is the resource more for general knowledge, or is it research-based?

Graphics:

- Are there charts and graphs that accompany the article?
- Is there an appendix to articles or the journal?
- Are any illustrations/pictures relevant to the topic?
- Are graphics clearly explained?
- Do the graphics appear professional?