**English 102**

**Scholarly Source Checklist**

Use this checklist to get a quick idea of whether the source you are looking at is a scholarly source. Most of these questions can be answered from looking at the citation and abstract that comes up when you do a database search, but some can be answered only by looking at the full text of the article. *(This may mean a trip to the library if the database does not provide the full text.)* The more questions you answer “Yes” to, the more likely it is that the source is a scholarly source. If you are unsure whether your source is scholarly, *ask me.* This list refers to articles in journals, but most of the questions apply to books as well.

**Tip:** Always write down the *author, title, journal title, journal volume, starting and ending page numbers and year of publication* when you find a useful source. This will be your bibliography entry for this source and will help you find it again easily.

1. **Title of journal:**
   - B. Is it specific? *Journal of the American Medical Association* is more specific than *Psychology Today.*
   - C. Is it specialized? For example, *The Journal of Economic History.* Who would read about this topic?

2. **Title of article:**
   - A. Is the article title descriptive? For example, "Safer at work: development and evaluation of an aggression and violence minimization program."
   - B. Is the article title specific? "Understanding the social context of violent and aggressive incidents on an inpatient unit" is more specific than "The Medicated Child."
   - C. Is the article title specialized? "Genetically Modified Crops and Risk Assessment in the UK" is more specialized than "Multinational Companies Unite to Fight Bribery."

3. **Are sources cited or references provided in the article?**
   - This means parenthetical in-text citations or footnotes are provided, indicating where information and ideas were taken from, *and* an extensive "Works Cited" or "References" list is provided at the end of the article. **If sources are not cited, stop!** A source without references is *not* a scholarly source.
   - ProQuest and EBSCO do let you limit your search to what they call “scholarly sources,” but they are not 100% reliable. *To be sure, you must look at the actual text of the article.*
   - **Caution:** A "Works Cited" list is not the same as a "Suggested Reading" list. The first is a complete list of every source this author has used throughout the article, whereas the second is simply a list of some suggestions. The first is a strong indication the source is scholarly, the second is a pretty good indication it is *not.*

4. **Is the journal peer-reviewed?** This is a strong indication that the source is scholarly, though some trade journals are peer-reviewed as well, and not all articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals are scholarly. See the “Peer Review Review” online handout for more information on peer-reviewed sources.

5. **Content of article** *(You will probably have to look at the full text of the article to answer these questions, though you might be able to figure it out from the abstract.):*
   - A. Is the article an in-depth treatment of its subject (usually several pages long with a lot of detailed information and in-depth analysis), written by experts for experts?
     - **If it is not in-depth, stop!** A source that does not provide an in-depth treatment, written by experts for other experts, is *not* a scholarly source.
   - B. Does the article have a thesis or argument or claim it’s trying to prove, or (if it’s a report of scientific research) a conclusion drawn from the research?
     - Most scholarly sources have a claim they are trying to prove, or a conclusion drawn from the research. Usually the abstract or the introduction will state what the thesis is.
   - C. Does the article incorporate original research?
     - Most scholarly sources are a combination of original research and analysis of earlier research, though in some cases they just review or summarize or analyze earlier research.

*(over)*
If after answering the first five questions you’re still not sure, here are some other points to look at.

6. **Language of article (You must look at the full text of the article to answer these questions.):**
   
   **A.** Is the language of the article specialized? Does it use technical vocabulary or concepts?
   
   Scholarly sources usually use specialized or technical language.
   
   **B.** Does the author of the article write as if the reader already knows the basics of the topic?
   
   Scholarly sources assume familiarity with the topic. This might take the form of mentioning names, titles, or ideas as though the reader already knows who or what they are.
   
   **C.** Is the article addressed to other specialists in the field?
   
   Scholarly sources are usually addressed to other specialists in the field. This might take the form of assuming the reader knows what the issues, debates, controversies or questions in the field are.
   
   **D.** Is the tone of the article serious, written to inform or persuade, not to entertain or amuse?
   
   Scholarly sources are almost always written in a serious, informative or persuasive tone. If your article is not, it is highly unlikely that it is a scholarly source.

7. **Is the journal published by a college or university or scholarly professional organization? (E.g., *Journal of the American Medical Association*, or *American Quarterly*, published by the American Studies Association, an interdisciplinary association of scholars who study American culture.)**

   Most scholarly sources are published by a college or university or a scholarly or professional organization. In print sources the publisher will usually be listed in the first few pages. In EBSCOhost and ProQuest the publisher is listed in the "Publications" tab, which you can get to by clicking on the title of the publication within the search record for your article.

8. **Is this the work of a team? Is (are) the author(s) a scholar/expert/specialist?**

   **A.** Is there more than one author? Articles with multiple authors, especially those with more than two, are often scholarly.
   
   **B.** Do(es) the author(s) have an advanced degree? Scholarly sources are usually written by people with advanced degrees in their field. Degrees are sometimes listed after the author's name (Ph.D., M.D., M.A., etc.). This information can be hard to find, so don’t waste a lot of time on it, but journals do sometimes provide descriptions of the author's credentials at the start of the article or in a separate "Notes on Contributors" section.
   
   **C.** Is (are) the author(s) affiliated with a college or university? Scholarly sources are usually written by professors at colleges or universities. Authors' affiliations are sometimes listed at the beginning of the article, right after the author's name. Again, don’t spend a lot of time on this.

9. **Appearance (These questions are easier to answer looking at a printed copy or image of the page.):**

   **A.** Does the article, and the journal in which it appears, consist mainly of large blocks of text, with few graphics or other visual elements to break it up? Most scholarly sources are primarily text, unless they include graphics whose purpose is to convey information, such as charts and graphs. See item C below.
   
   **B.** Is the formatting plain and simple?
   
   **C.** Are graphics included to inform rather than entertain? Most scholarly journals do not include graphics just to liven up the page. They use graphs, charts and diagrams to provide information, not to catch the reader’s eye or entertain.
   
   **D.** Does the journal contain no advertising, or only small, unobtrusive ads (typically for books, other journals, conferences, scholarly organizations and the like), often restricted to one section of the journal separate from the articles? Most scholarly journals do not carry advertising, or carry only a small amount and very restricted types of ads.