

Working with Scholarly Articles

This tutorial has three sections. It can be viewed as a whole or section-by-section.

The following transcript applies to Section 1: What is a Scholarly Article?

Transcripts for [Section 2: Reading a Scholarly Article](#) and [Section 3: Finding and Identifying Scholarly Articles](#) are also available.

Section 1: What is a Scholarly Article?

Imagine that you have been given a research assignment in which your instructor has asked you to find information on a psychological disorder of your choice including what it is, what causes it, and how it is treated. You choose dissociative identity disorder, also known as multiple personality disorder.

Your professor wants you to use scholarly articles as part of your assignment so you begin to search for answers to the required questions.

There are hundreds of scholarly articles on the topic, so you seem to be in good shape. But as you search, something seems to be wrong. One article says that DID is caused by trauma in childhood while another says that it is primarily therapist-induced. The research in some articles supports treating DID by trying to unify the patient's different identities while the research in others supports the use of medications. Then there are the articles that argue that Dissociative Identity Disorder doesn't even exist.

Seeing this, you may start to feel confused and frustrated. How are you supposed to find the right answers for your assignment if all of these scholarly articles disagree on the very points you're supposed to be researching?

The truth is, when it comes to scholarly research, there is seldom ever a right answer for you to find no matter what topic you may be researching. Instead, the sources you are finding are a part of an ongoing scholarly conversation in which many perspectives may be represented. It's up to you to develop an understanding of those perspectives and negotiate meaning from them. In this way, you'll become a participant in the scholarly conversation.

Scholarly conversations take place in a variety of venues including, but not limited to, scholarly peer-reviewed journals. It is in these publications that experts publish the research that they do as a way of contributing to the scholarly conversation.

Scholarly journal articles are different from the news and magazine articles you might encounter online or at the grocery store. News and magazine articles, which are also called popular articles, are written by journalists who work for that publication.

Popular articles usually cover topics of current interest to the general public such as current events in politics or entertainment and are written in a way that anyone who might be interested can easily understand them even if they have little or no background knowledge in the topic. The goal of a popular article is not only to inform the reader, but also to sell issues or attract clicks.

Scholarly articles, on the other hand are written by specialized authors for a specialized audience as a way of sharing research in the hopes of advancing knowledge in the field and influencing the direction of the scholarly conversation. These authors might work for universities or other institutions where research is done.

It can be difficult for someone with no background in a particular field to start reading a scholarly article and understand what it is about due to the specialized language used, sometimes called jargon. The intended audience is other experts who may read the article and decide that they want to replicate, build on, or even refute what is in it.

Scholarly journals are also sometimes called peer-reviewed journals. When an article is published in a magazine, it usually goes through an editorial process in which facts are checked and quotes are verified. Scholarly articles go through a similar editorial process but on top of this process is another process called "peer review."

Peer review is focused on ensuring that the research described in the article is valid and that the findings add something important to the conversation. This

process is conducted by the author's peers in the field, other experts who are knowledgeable about previous research on similar topics. Though the peer review process may not be perfect, it does add an extra layer of credibility to the published article.

As we have seen, not all scholarly articles will agree with each other. Different researchers may have different ways of explaining the same phenomena or their research may have led them to a different conclusion altogether. Which answers are given the most weight depends on a number of factors, including who is considered to have the most authority, a topic that you can learn more about in [our other online materials](#).

Remember that no matter what, seeking out unfamiliar perspectives and comparing the works of different authors including those who may publish outside of scholarly journals can be beneficial as you begin to form your own thoughts and ideas on a particular topic and begin to participate in that scholarly conversation.

Before you can contribute to the conversation, you need to be able to tell what it is that's being said. In [the next section](#), you will learn about the common elements that make up a scholarly journal article.

Scroll down to answer a Check Your Knowledge question to complete this section.

Check Your Knowledge

The purpose of a scholarly article is best described as:

- a) Informing the general public about advances in scholarly research.
- b) Finding the right answer to explain phenomena through valid research studies and experiments.
- c) Advancing knowledge in a field and contributing to an ongoing scholarly conversation.
- d) Giving authors a venue for submitting their work for the peer review process, which adds a layer of credibility to their article.

You Answered: C

Correct!

[Exit the Tutorial](#)

[Continue to Section 2](#)

You Answered: A, B, or D

Incorrect

Scholarly articles describe research studies and experiments conducted by experts in a field as a way of advancing knowledge in that field and contributing to an ongoing conversation sometimes by suggesting entirely new ideas or by supporting or even refuting previously established research.

The goal is not necessarily to find the one right answer but to build on the ideas of others on a path to better understanding observed phenomena. These articles are written by specialized authors for a specialized audience and may not be of interest to everyone.

[Continue to Section 2](#) or [Review more](#)

Optional review

Myth 1: Scholarly articles are intended to inform the general public about advances in scholarly research.

You may see headlines in the news or online touting the impact of a new research study, suggesting for example that the source from which you get your news may affect how well-informed you are about current events or that spending less on your wedding leads to less change of divorce.

These news stories are intended to inform the general public about advances in scholarly research and are often based on scholarly articles, interpreting their results in an easily digestible fashion but they are not scholarly articles themselves.

Scholarly articles are not reported by journalists to the general public but are written by experts for specialized audiences as a way of as a way of advancing a scholarly conversation.

Myth 2: Scholarly journal articles are intended to find the right answer to explain phenomena.

As stated earlier in the tutorial, scholarship is a conversation where scholars build on each other's research in search of ways to adequately explain phenomena observed in various settings. It's important to understand that while these scholars may be searching for the best explanation for what they observe, there is not always a single right answer.

It is possible to find articles that describe valid research on the same topic but come to completely different conclusions at the end or articles that come to the same conclusion but arrive at that conclusion in very different ways.

Becoming familiar with these different approaches can be beneficial as you begin to form your own thoughts and ideas on a topic. Don't dismiss an article you find just because the author has a different argument than the one you are trying to make.

Myth 3: The peer review process is the purpose of a scholarly article.

Scholarly articles go through not only the standard editing process, but also a peer review process by which the article author's peers, other experts in the field who are knowledgeable about previously established research, check to make sure that the research described in the article is valid and important.

While the peer review process is an important component of publishing scholarly articles, and helps add a layer of credibility to the article, it would be inaccurate to describe it as the main purpose of a scholarly article.

Check Your Knowledge

The purpose of a scholarly article is best described as:

- a) [Informing the general public about advances in scholarly research.](#)
- b) [Finding the right answer to explain phenomena through valid research studies and experiments.](#)
- c) [Advancing knowledge in a field and contributing to an ongoing scholarly conversation.](#)
- d) [Giving authors a venue for submitting their work for the peer review process, which adds a layer of credibility to their article.](#)