

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY SOURCE IS SCHOLARLY?

For most of your assignments, you are expected to use scholarly sources, also called academic or peer-reviewed.

But how can you tell if your source is scholarly? Here are 5 tips to help.

First, scholarly sources have academic authors. The author or authors will always have their names listed. These authors are nearly always professional researchers who work at a university or research institute. Your source will have information about which university they work at and how to get in touch with them about their research.

Tip 2: scholarly sources report on original research conducted by the authors. This research often takes the form of a study, and the authors report the results and findings, or propose new theories.

Tip 3: scholarly articles have fairly standard and recognizable structures. They normally start with an abstract or summary at the beginning. There is an introduction that puts the research into the context of other research on the topic. Then there are descriptions of the methods used in the study, the results, a discussion of the results, their implications and importance, and then a list of references. Not all scholarly articles have this structure, but it's very common.

Tip 4: scholarly sources always contain a great many references to other scholarly sources. Academic research builds on what other researchers have already done, so all scholarly sources acknowledge how other people's work has influenced their thinking, just like you are supposed to do in your papers. The authors mention these scholarly sources in the text, and list them at the end in a bibliography or list of references.

Tip 5: search for your sources using the Laurier Library databases, which are specialized search tools for scholarly sources. Nearly all the databases have an option to limit your results to Peer-reviewed or scholarly journals, either before or after you search. Picking this option will ensure that your results are scholarly nearly all the time, but it's not perfect. Some sources that aren't scholarly still slip in, so make sure you use the other 4 tips to evaluate what you find.

One type of source that looks scholarly but isn't is a dissertation. These have characteristics of scholarly sources, but are papers for a university degree and aren't published. Check with your instructor to see if they will accept dissertations as scholarly sources.

Review articles are also tricky. They aren't scholarly sources, because they only discuss someone else's research, they aren't original research on their own. If one looks good, find and use the book discussed in the review instead.

Those are 5 tips for deciding whether your source is scholarly.

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.