

# Recipes to Recognize Credible Scholarly Sources

*By Dr. Marilyn Simon and Dr. Jim Goes*

*Authors of **Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for Success (2013 Edition)***

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A scholarly source is one that is *peer reviewed* or *refereed* and published in a recognized academic publication, such as a professional journal or a university publisher. Peer review means that the material is evaluated critically by experts on the subject, and only published if meets the standards of the discipline. These experts advise the journal's editorial staff for or against publication of the article. A peer reviewer insures that the research described in a journal's articles is sound and of high quality. The process is usually “double blind”; that is, the reviewers do not know the names of the authors, and the authors do not know the names of the reviewers.

## **Journals**

Here are some principles (recipes) to which most scholarly journals adhere:

1. The format is usually serious, very factual, and not particularly attractive.
2. There are usually tables and figures that illustrate complex ideas but seldom pictures or photographs.
3. Sources are fully cited and a reference section is included that contains each citation alphabetized by the authors last name.
4. The main intent is to inform other scholars or experts in the field, rather than to entertain, persuade, or sell a product or service.
5. The audience consists of individuals familiar with the research in the subject matter rather than the lay public.
6. The language uses discipline-specific terminology.

7. The publisher of the journal is usually a professional organization rather than a commercial, for-profit organization. Some recognized academic publishers include university presses, Blackwell, Sage, Emerald, and Routledge.

To check if a journal is peer-reviewed, you can consult Ulrich's™

<http://www.ulrichsweb.com/ulrichsweb/faqs.asp>. Here you will find sources of bibliographic and publisher information for more than 300,000 periodicals of all types, including academic and scholarly journals and publications that are published regularly or irregularly and that are circulated free of charge or by paid subscription. It is important to note that peer reviewed journals often include book reviews, letters, notes, and editorials that have not gone through the peer review process. These are not to be used as refereed sources in your study.

## **Textbooks**

There are some excellent general research textbooks published by authors such as Creswell, Leedy and Ormrod, and Simon and Goes. They are intended as teaching tools and to serve as a technical guide for what to do and what not to do in research. They are not intended to be the definitive source for any particularly research method, although they do contain references for germinal texts on your method of choice.

If you were just learning to cook, you might find Betty Crocker cookbooks most helpful. If you were going to prepare an elaborate French meal, you might then check out Julia Child's French cooking books. If you were planning to make a soufflé, then Waldo's book, *The Soufflé Cookbook*, would likely be your most beneficial source. The same principle applies for books about research. If you are planning a case study, do not cite Creswell as a definitive source; Creswell is a general methods text, but not a detailed text on case studies. Instead, check out the detailed, focused books by Yin, Stake, and Merriam. Similarly, consult Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological studies, Glaser and Strauss (1967) for grounded theory research, and Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2002), Black (1999), or Vogt (2006) for extensive discussions on quantitative methodologies. Pandza (2008) has some good information for Delphi studies.

## Internet Sources

Many scholarly journals have moved on-line and publish web versions of their manuscripts that are as reliable and acceptable as their hard-copy equivalents. Indeed, some professional organizations publish *only* web versions of their journals. You can find many scholarly sources by using online databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, PsycInfo, and PubMed.

It is important to note that encyclopedias or dictionaries, of any kind, including the very popular Wikipedia, Dictionary.com, and Merriam Webster Online, are **not** primary sources and should not be cited or used in constructing term papers at the undergraduate or graduate level. They can, however, be useful to help gather some background information and to point the way to more scholarly source material (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Sometimes you will find papers on the web that are unpublished. These are often working papers in various stages of completion. Some of these papers are in "pre-prints", that is, the paper is released prior to publication, and meant for discussion. Drafts are works in progress and almost guaranteed to be changed. It is best to stick with only published works. Use working papers as sources only if there are no refereed sources on the particular topic, and know that working papers do not count as peer reviewed source material.

A "zine" (short for fanzine, or magazine) is usually a small circulation, self-published work of original and/or appropriated texts and images, and is often reproduced via photocopier. Zines are rarely scholarly - again, the review process is the key. Anyone can put anything up on the internet, and so the peer review process is all the more important.

You should be quite suspicious of other works on the web, particularly web log postings. Just typing some search string into Google will not give you reliable results. You might, however, look for portal pages for particular topics or issues. Sometimes academic authors will compile pages or collections of the best resources on the web. These can be useful, but even many of these resources are not likely peer reviewed. These may be great tools to *find* peer reviewed

literature, but are not primary sources and therefore would not be up to the level required for scholarly work.

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