How to find scholarly sources

It is likely that at some point in your studies you will be asked to find 'scholarly', 'peer reviewed' or 'academic' sources.

What does this mean? These terms are often used interchangebly, but they are not always the same thing. Scholarly or academic is an umbrella term for several different kinds of authoritative and credible sources including peer reviewed articles, some books and resources known as 'grey literature' .

Scholarly articles

Both magazines and journals are considered serials, they are available in issues and contain articles. Scholarly journals and articles, however, have a number of features that tell you they are scholarly. Use this checklist to help you evaluate:

✓ Are they written by researchers or scholars in the discipline?
✓ Do they contain an abstract, which summarises key points?
✓ Do they provide evidence of research findings?
✓ Is there in-text citations and a reference list?
✓ Are they written in a formal writing style and use specialised discipline terminology?
✓ Is the article **peer reviewed?** This means it has been evaluated by experts in the field before publishing. Most scholarly articles are peer reviewed.

How do I find peer reviewed articles?

Many search tools allow you to *focus* your search so that all articles are peer reviewed or scholarly. For example in the Library Collection you can limit results by Peer-reviewed Journals.
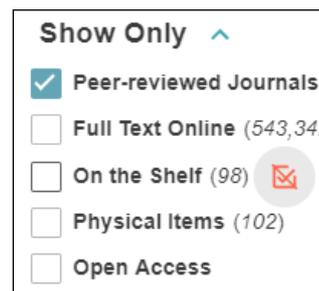
How can I be sure that an article is peer reviewed?

We recommend you use *Ulrichsweb: Global Serials Directory*, available from the Library's list of databases. Enter the journal title in the search box and select 🔍.
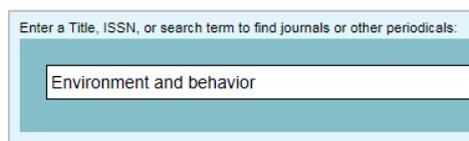

If the journal is peer reviewed:

- the **refereed (peer reviewed)** symbol 📖 appears next to the journal title.

No results? Try searching again using selected keywords from the title.

How to find scholarly sources

Scholarly books

Like articles, not all books are scholarly but there are features that help you determine if a book is scholarly, so use this checklist to help you decide:
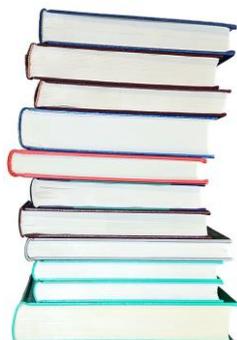
- ✓ Are references used?
- ✓ Are they written in a formal style and use specialised discipline terminology?
- ✓ Are they written by an expert in the field
- ✓ Are they published by a well known academic publisher, for example by a university press?
- ✓ Do they have an editor? Not all scholarly book are edited but if they are this is a good indicator that the book is scholarly.

You cannot limit your search to scholarly books in most search tools, you will need to use this checklist to determine if the book you want to use for your research is scholarly.

Other scholarly sources such as 'grey literature'

Information that is not published through traditional channels like books and journal articles is sometimes called 'grey literature'.

Some examples of grey literature are theses (dissertations), conferences papers, reports, government documents, policy statements, statistics or even some webpages. This can provide valuable and current information for your research.

Grey literature is harder to evaluate than other sources so use this checklist to help you decide whether your source is scholarly:
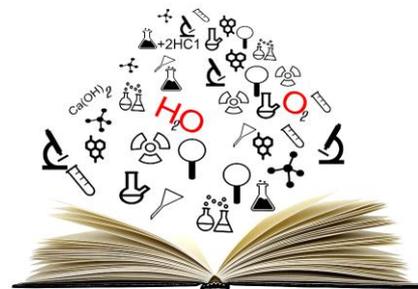
*Not every point is relevant to each source as there is such a wide variety.

- ✓ Who has written the information? Does it come from a reputable organisation (eg WHO or OECD) or author where their credentials are clear?
- ✓ Is there evidence of research findings? Do other sources substantiate these findings?
- ✓ Is there a reference list or bibliography?
- ✓ Does it provide context or add value to your argument?
- ✓ What purpose does the information have, who is the audience, is there obvious bias?
- ✓ If the source contains statistics or other data how was it collected and for what purpose?

Watch **Evaluating Information** for more help

For further information about Library resources and services visit: www.library.unisa.edu.au/