Introduction to journal articles

In this post, we will look at what journal articles are and how you can find relevant journals for your area of research.

# Introduction

A journal is similar to a magazine in that it’s a collection of articles which can be published at regular intervals. The articles in a journal are considered high quality academic sources of information.

Unlike a book which, once published, can be out of date quite quickly, a journal article can be the most recently published research and significantly, it is written by the experts in a particular field. Each journal article is **peer-reviewed** and critiqued by researchers and experts in the field before being published.

In this post, we will explore how to recognise a journal, and where you can find relevant articles for your subject.

# Key components of a journal

## Peer review

Many journals operate a peer review process, where peer experts working in that subject area review articles and provide feedback to authors. This is widely considered to be a measure of quality.

There are many ways in which peer review is applied and you can find out more from the individual journal websites. You can also learn more about types of peer review in [this resource](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mre/peer-review/story_html5.html).

## Identifying a journal: the cover

The cover of academic journals usually clearly identify the:

* Journal title
* Publisher
* Vol (Volume)
* Nos (for Number)
* Year
* ISSN ( An 8-digit code used to identify newspapers, journals, magazines and periodicals).

A journal front page can include the year as well as the volume which allows you to quickly identify the specific publication you are interested in.

# Key components of an article

The components and structure of a journal article can vary across the disciplines. What you see in a scientific article will differ from a humanities-based article. In this post, we will cover the most common components you can expect to find.

You can quickly work out if you want to spend the time reading the whole article by scanning the introduction, abstract and conclusion of the article. Is it interesting? Does it cover the areas you are interested in? If so, then download the article to read and explore later.

* **Introduction:** This ‘introduces’ the reader to the background of what the article is going to cover; this can include setting out the research question that is going to be discussed and a description of specific terms that are going to be used in the article.
* **Abstract:** This is an overview of the research study and is typically two to four paragraphs in length.
* **Main body:** This is the main part of the article and is generally split into different subsections to clearly demonstrate to the reader the content that is going to be addressed. It will contain the methodology used to carry out the research, the results, analysis and discussion.
* **Methodology:** What methods were used to gather the data? Was the data qualitative or quantitative? Other options can include using questionnaires, interviews or field research. In theory, a clear methodology should allow others to replicate the original research and evaluate it is as well. The opposite is true of an unclear methodology with badly collected data which doesn’t support the conclusions in the article. The methodology will vary depending upon the discipline; a scientific article will look different from a humanities article, based on the methodology used.
* **Results:**this section can include: the data collected, tables, graphs and figures plus a summary of the results.
* **Discussion:** in this section, the writer focuses on discussing the results of the research carried out in relation to the research question. Broadly, this will include how the results relate to the question being asked and the implications of those results.
* **Conclusion:** Following on from the discussion, the conclusion should pull everything together and reinforce the writer’s point of view.
* **References:**this section includes a list of all the references that have been cited in the article by the author. You can check the references to see if there are further articles that could be interesting for your research. Copy and paste the author and title from the reference into [Library Search](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/) to check out the abstract.

# Using journal articles in your work

Journal articles as well as academic books are a key source of the information and research available on all academic topics. Your lecturers expect you to find and read relevant journal articles to help you develop your understanding of your subject.

You should use them for the following reasons:

* **Credibility**: Journal articles are written by the experts in their subject area.
* **Evidence based**: The author(s) should include evidence or refer to the evidence that backs up the conclusions reached in the article.
* **Primary research**: This can include the collection of qualitative and quantitative data that has been carried out by the writer of the journal article, such as surveys, focus groups, questionnaires, observations and interviews. This is separate from using secondary research, where the writer is relying on the data collection from research already carried out and published.
* **Depth of thinking/intro to a wealth of research**: Journal articles are written by the experts in their subject area and include in-depth knowledge and analysis of existing research.
* **Subject specific**: Journal articles tend to be focused on a specific research area. The library provides you with access to a wide range of [subject guides](https://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/index.php?b=g&d=a) that you can use to find journal articles for your coursework.
* **Up to date/ latest research**: Unlike a book, which can go out of date quite quickly, journal articles are published on a regular basis and can provide you with the latest data and research on your subject area.
* **Reference list**: Each journal article should include a comprehensive list of references of the sources used in the article. The reference list is a useful way to track down other relevant journal articles for your research.
* **Citation count**: Using citation counts is considered a way in which the impact or quality of an article is assessed by looking at how many times other authors mention a journal article in their work. There are two databases called [Web of Science](https://www.librarysearch.manchester.ac.uk/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=44MAN_INST:MU_NUI&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&tab=Everything&docid=alma9928963144401631) and [Scopus](https://www.librarysearch.manchester.ac.uk/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=44MAN_INST:MU_NUI&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&tab=Everything&docid=alma9928963144401631) that you can use to check the citation count of an article that you are interested in. Citations in some disciplines, however, are traditionally significantly higher than others so don’t rely on this as a sole measure.

# Finding relevant journals for your subject

There are three important resources that you can use to find journal articles for your subject area. These include the following:

* [Library Search](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/) allows you to search for and access resources (articles, books, journals, images etc.) held by or subscribed to by The University of Manchester Library. It pulls together many of the Library’s systems and allows you to search across them simultaneously. It’s easy to use and find useful information.
* [Subject databases](https://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/index.php?b=g&d=a) are a key resource for finding the latest ​peer reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings.
* [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/) is a search tool that combines the ease of use of Google search while returning only scholarly sources such as academic e-books and e-journal articles.

When you are searching for journal articles, it’s important that you use multiple resources to locate the relevant information. Each database or platform resource includes access to a range of different journals, so searching multiple databases is essential to ensure that you find and read the key literature on your subject.

Take a look at the [Library Support for Searching](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/packages/searching/) resource also linked in the further support section below.

# Summary

In this post, we explored what journals are, including how to find relevant journals and articles for your subject. We recommend you also take a look at our post ‘[Reading journal articles critically](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/reading-journal-articles-critically-5cbef004cf2c)’, where we explore how to apply critical thinking skills when reading journal articles.