The Scholarly Article Autopsy

Information Sources from the Inside Out

Krista Bowers Sharpe
Western Illinois University Libraries
Presentation Overview:

- Background

- Scholarly article autopsy activity
  - Audience
  - Learning Objectives
  - Materials & Procedure
  - Assessment of student learning
  - Alignment with ACRL Framework
  - Experience: Difficulties and Positive Outcomes
Background: Earlier incarnations
Types of Periodicals: Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-scholarly Periodicals: A Checklist of Criteria

Introduction
Journals and magazines, collectively referred to as periodicals, are important sources of up-to-date information in all disciplines. In the future you may need to read a particular type of periodical known as a scholarly or research-oriented journal. This guide is designed to help you distinguish between a scholarly journal and other types of periodicals.

Periodical Classification
There are four broad categories of periodicals: 1) scholarly or research-oriented, 2) professional, trade, or industry, 3) news or opinion, and 4) popular. Use the information below to help you distinguish between a scholarly journal and other types of periodicals.

If in Doubt
A periodical may not be clearly within one of the four categories outlined above. If in doubt, see Magazine for Libraries (Ref. Z0941 M23). Use the title index at the back to locate your periodical. Another option is Ulrich’s International Periodicals Directory. This is an online resource available to WIU users. Only one person may log in at a time, so please log out when you finish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scholarly and Research Journals</th>
<th>Professional, Trade and Industry</th>
<th>News or Commentary</th>
<th>Popular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>To report original research, provide in-depth analysis</td>
<td>To report current trends, news, and events in a particular field, focusing on product, company and biographical information</td>
<td>To report or comment on current events in all areas; often hard to distinguish between fact and opinion</td>
<td>To entertain and inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Researchers, professors, scholars; author’s credentials noted</td>
<td>Journalists; author’s credentials infrequently noted</td>
<td>Journalists; author’s credentials rarely noted</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>College educated or equivalent; assumes background knowledge</td>
<td>Practitioners in the field</td>
<td>General population</td>
<td>General population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>Footnotes and bibliographies present</td>
<td>Sources rarely cited, usually noted within article rather than in notes</td>
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<td>Sources rarely cited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>Ads are rarely present</td>
<td>Ads relate to the profession/industry</td>
<td>Advertises any and all products</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Professional organizations</td>
<td>Commercial trade publisher or professional organization</td>
<td>Commercial publisher</td>
<td>Commercial publisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Psychological Bulletin, New Journal of Medicine, Econometrica</td>
<td>Beverage World, RN, Library Journal</td>
<td>Time, Sports Illustrated, New Republic, Sierra, Psychology Today</td>
<td>People Weekly, Reader’s Digest, Redbook, Self</td>
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Scholarly and Non-Scholarly Periodicals

Title of Periodical (on cover): ________________________________

Answer the following questions about the periodical AS A WHOLE:

1. Is the cover visually interesting (pictures, etc.)?  □ Yes  □ Kinda  □ No
2. Does the periodical have advertisements?  □ Yes  □ No
3. Who is responsible for publishing it?  □ A business (i.e. Time Warner) □ Just a few  □ A university or association
4. How many articles are listed in the table of contents?  □ A lot of little articles □ Only a few big articles

Choose ONE ARTICLE and answer the following questions:

5. Is there an abstract (summary) at the beginning?  □ No  □ Yes
6. Is there information about the author?  □ No  □ Yes
   If yes, what is his/her job/position? ________________________________
7. How long is the article?  □ Under 5 pages  □ Between 5 and 10 pages  □ More than 10 pages
8. Does the article have footnotes and/or a bibliography?  □ No  □ Yes
9. What type of content does it contain?  □ News or opinion □ In-depth analysis  □ Original research
10. For whom is it written? Who is the audience?  □ General public □ Practitioners (i.e. teachers) □ Researchers
    What makes you think so? ______________________________________

Based on your answers to the above questions, what kind of publication is this?
□ non-scholarly  □ not sure  □ scholarly
## Scholarly and Non-Scholarly Sources: Comparison Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Article 1 title:</th>
<th>Article 2 title:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is the article visually interesting (pictures, etc.)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Does the article contain advertisements? How many? What kind?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Can you tell who is responsible for publishing it?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is there an abstract (summary) at the beginning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Is there information about the author?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>If yes, what is his/her job/position?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How long is the article?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does the article have footnotes and/or a bibliography?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What type of content does it contain?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News or opinion</td>
<td>original research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth analysis</td>
<td>In-depth analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>For whom is it written? Who is the audience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General public</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>Researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b</td>
<td>What makes you think so?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Based on your answers to the above questions, which of the two publications is the scholarly one?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals for Developing New Activity:

- Incorporate Active Learning:
  - Teamwork
  - Self-discovery
  - Responsibility for various tasks
  - Reporting of findings

- Align more closely with ACRL Framework
autopsy, n.

1. The action or process of seeing with one's own eyes; personal observation, inspection, or experience. Now rare.
   
   1651 R. Wittie tr. J. Primrose Pop. Erroours i. xiv. 53 “Or by autopsie [L. per autopsiam], when by our observation, wee get a certaine knowledge of things.”

2.
   a. med. Examination of the organs of a dead body in order to determine the cause of death, nature and extent of disease, result of treatment, etc.; post-mortem examination; an instance of this.
   b. fig. A critical examination or dissection of a subject or work.

   1835 Hist. Eng. in Lardner’s Cab. Cycl. IV. viii. 375 “He [sc. James I.] is, moreover, one of the least inviting subjects of moral autopsia.”

Learning objectives:

- The student will be able to identify the standard elements of scholarly writing.
- The student will be able to distinguish scholarly from non-scholarly literature.
- The student will be able to select the appropriate type of source to use in various contexts.
Audience:

- Students taking a research methods course in the major:
  - Sociology 323: Social Research Methods II
  - Anthropology 305: Applied Anthropological Methods

- Possible adaptations: any setting that requires in-depth examination of:
  - information creation processes
  - the construction of authority
  - contextual appropriateness of sources
Time duration:

- Ideally at least 75 minutes

- Can be fit into 50 minutes, but resulting student learning is more superficial
Materials:

- Instruction station with access to the internet
- Online guide with links to example articles in PDF
- Each pair/group needs:
  - a copy of the worksheet
  - a copy of a printed scholarly article
  - at least one computer with access to the internet
  - a highlighter and a writing utensil
Description of exercise:

- **Setup**: assign teams, distribute materials (5 min.)

- **Introduce** the process: review worksheet, tell students to assign roles (5 min.)

- **Activity**: Check in with teams as they complete worksheet and mark up article (30-35 min.)

- **Report back**: Have students report findings back to entire class; guide the discussion so as to cover all aspects of worksheet and stress information creation processes and construction of authority (20-30 min.)

- **Session evaluation**: (5 min.)
Today’s Activity

Today we’re going to perform an autopsy on a scholarly article. In other words, we’re going to cut it open and look at all the parts so that we can better understand it. For this activity, you will:

1. Break into groups and assign in-group tasks.
2. Complete a worksheet that answers specific questions about a scholarly article.
3. Look at a non-scholarly article and compare the two types.
4. Present your findings to the class.
5. Turn in your worksheet and the paper copy of article 1.

IN-CLASS WORKSHEET

Scholarly Articles (Sociology)

Please use this article to answer the questions in the first part of your worksheet:

Group 1: Boys Doing Art: The Construction of Outlaw Masculinity in a Portland, Oregon, Graffiti Crew

Group 2: Masculinities and College Men’s Depression: Recursive Relationships

Group 3: Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music

Group 4: The Whole Playboy Mansion Image: Girls’ Fashioning and Fashioned Selves Within a Postfeminist Culture

Group 5: Smash Mouth Football, Identity Development and Maintenance on a Women’s Tackle Football Team

Non-scholarly Articles (Sociology)

Please complete the last part of your worksheet by comparing this article to your scholarly article:

Group 1: Graffiti’s Story, From Vandalism to Art to Nostalgia
Activity: Preliminaries

Scholarly Article Autopsy

Group Members:
Recorder: ________________________________
Presenter 1: ______________________________
Presenter 2: ______________________________

Title of Article: ____________________________________________
Activity: Quick Clues

1. What kind of information can you find about the author(s) of the article?

2. Find the abstract and quickly scan it. What is an abstract? Why is it included with the article?

3. Are there any graphics included in the article? What kind? Why are they included?

4. Identify citations within your article text. Circle below what style of citation your article uses:
   a. Numbered endnotes  b. In-text citations  c. Numbered footnotes

5. Find one citation in the article text and highlight it, then turn to the bibliography/notes at the end of the article. Highlight the entry that corresponds to your citation.
6. Find the **research question** and **highlight it** (it may be more than one sentence). If it is not explicitly stated, please write the article’s central idea in your own words below:

7. Find the **methods** or **methodology** section of your article. How was the study conducted? How were subjects found? What tools were used to gather data? Summarize what was done.
Activity: Comparison

After you have completed questions 1-7, come ask me for your comparison article.

8. Look at the comparison article and find at least three major differences between your scholarly article and your comparison article:
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

9. **When** could you use this kind of article?

10. Is it **better or worse** than a scholarly source?

11. **So, why** do scholarly articles exist? **Who** should use them and for what purposes?
Activity: Report Back Structure

1. Bring up PDF of article 1 up on screen. All of the presenters with article 1 come to the front and discuss questions 1-3, showing what they found on screen.

2. Presenters for article 2 come up, bring up the PDF, and talk about questions 4-5, citations. Make sure they show the link between a citation and its bibliography entry and discuss how citation is part of the research process and construction of authority.

3. Presenters for article 3 talk about the research question. Display it on screen, talk about what a research question is and what role it plays in the creation of information.

4. Presenters for article 4 talk about methods used and their role in information creation and authority construction.

5. Finally, have presenters for article 5 talk about the comparison to non-scholarly. Make sure they show the visible differences on-screen.

Note: The above process must be adapted to fit with the number of groups constituted, the example articles used, and students’ reports.
Assessment of student learning:

The librarian and the teacher of record evaluate students’ learning based on:

- oral reports of the groups
- discussion between groups
- completed worksheets and accompanying marked-up articles

Questions to ask:

- Did students correctly identify the elements and appropriate uses of scholarly and non-scholarly articles in their oral reports and on worksheets?
- Did discussion between groups demonstrate students’ ability to apply knowledge of the characteristics/elements of scholarly and non-scholarly writing to other, unfamiliar articles?
ACRL Information Literacy Framework:

- **Authority is Constructed and Contextual:**
  - **Knowledge Practice 2:** Use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources, understanding the elements that might temper this credibility.
  - **Knowledge Practice 3:** Understand that many disciplines have acknowledged authorities in the sense of well-known scholars and publications that are widely considered standard. Even in those situations, some scholars would challenge the authority of those sources.

- **Information Creation as a Process:**
  - **Knowledge Practice 1:** Articulate the capabilities and constraints of information developed through various creation processes.
  - **Knowledge Practice 2:** Assess the fit between an information product’s creation process and a particular information need.
  - **Knowledge Practice 4:** Recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged.
  - **Disposition 1:** Are inclined to seek out characteristics of information products that indicate the underlying creation process.
  - **Disposition 2:** Value the process of matching an information need with an appropriate product.
Experience: Challenges

- Lack of buy-in by some students
- Not enough time
- Teacher involvement is imperative
- Teams of three not ideal
Experience: Positive Outcomes

- More active learning
  - More discussion during class period
  - Greater ownership taken for learning

- Closer alignment with ACRL Framework
  - Direct & sustained engagement with sources
  - Deeper understanding of the difference in creation, audience, & uses of source types
  - Emphasis on discipline-specific standards through use of targeted examples
Comments & Suggestions:

Krista Bowers Sharpe

Coordinator of Reference Service
Western Illinois University Libraries
1 University Circle
Macomb, IL 61455

ka-bowers-sharpe@wiu.edu