Scholarly vs. Popular Sources

What is a scholarly source?
Scholarly sources have passed peer review before publication. Think of peer review as fact checking the work; if the facts stand up to scrutiny from academics in the field, the source passes peer review. Many journal articles, as well as some books, are scholarly sources. To check if a source is in fact scholarly, look at the publishers; if the source was published by a university or other reputable society, then it has passed peer review. You can find both physical copies of scholarly sources and online database entries through the UTD library.

What is a popular source?
A popular source has not been subject to peer review. There are no restrictions on what can be considered a popular source; news segments, magazine articles, podcasts, and popular literature are all examples of popular sources. While these sources may have been approved by an editor, they have not been subjected to the academic review scholarly sources face and may contain grievous factual errors. Because of this, popular sources are considered less reliable.

Should I only use scholarly sources?
Not necessarily. A variety of sources, both popular and scholarly, can greatly strengthen your work. Depending on what you are writing, popular sources can give a great deal of insight. Consider a People article about harassment Brad Pitt has experienced, a blog post from someone experiencing political unrest, or a piece of artwork created in response to global warming: while none of these have been peer reviewed, they can each bring something to a piece of writing. Most formal academic writing will require scholarly sources, but this can vary based on assignments; a research paper generally requires more scholarly sources than a two-page analysis of a news article. If in serious doubt about what is appropriate, consult your professor.

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