

Why Question the Accuracy of a Web Page?

In terms of quality control, the world of traditional print publishing and the Internet bear little resemblance to each other.

In the scholarly publication process there are a number of steps an article goes through before editors and referees decide whether or not to publish it. When an author submits an article an editor assigns it to at least two, sometimes as many as four, independent referees. This is called the peer-review process. The referees review the article and write reports that recommend acceptance, acceptance with minor changes, acceptance with major changes, or rejection. Final acceptance rates are about 30% and the entire process takes up to a year.

We used to be able to say that in *general* on the Web there are no editors (unlike most print publications). But now it is possible to find many edited documents and peer-reviewed ejournals available on the Web. It could be said though, that there are few editors *of* the Internet. There is no system in place for people to proofread and "send back" or "reject" a document until it meets the standards of a publishing house's reputation. This lack of review and revision process means that not all Web pages are reliable or valuable. Documents can easily be copied and falsified, or copied with omissions and errors - intentional or accidental.

Articles from journals, magazines and periodicals are becoming increasingly available through the Internet. The table below shows some of the characteristics of scholarly and popular journals. Not all the criteria will be met for every journal, and there will be exceptions, but being aware of the differences will assist you to select sources appropriate to your research needs.

	Scholarly Journals	Popular Magazines
Examples	Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Water, Science and Technology Foreign Affairs Science Nature	Time Newsweek Psychology Today
Authors	Researchers Professors Scholars Professionals who are usually experts in narrow fields	Journalists Lay people Anonymous
References	Includes references, bibliographies or footnotes	Rarely includes references, bibliographies, or footnotes

Edited by?	Submitted articles are subjected to a rigorous peer-review process by researchers, professionals and/or students of the field	Submitted articles may be reviewed by journalists and lay people
Language	Specialized language of the discipline is used Often includes tabulated data, graphs and diagrams	Language is non-technical
Contents	Always includes an abstract Lengthy articles of original research In-depth analysis of topic Substantial book reviews	Shorter articles of general interest Coverage of current events/news Some brief book reviews
Presentation and Graphics	Less flashy, more "serious" in appearance Advertisements are rare (an exception is medical journals) Articles are often divided into explicitly named (and sometimes numbered) sections	More eye-catching appearance Many pictures Many advertisements
Where Indexed?	Found in specialized indexes such as Anthropological Index Georef Medline	Found in general periodical indexes such as Academic Search Elite Canadian Periodical Index Reader's Guide Abstracts (But keep in mind that general periodical indexes also include scholarly material)

Sloppy or poorly put together graphs or charts should be regarded with suspicion. Not only is such information difficult to use, it is also inconsistent with quality research from a credible source and should lead you to suspect the accuracy of the information on the page.

Regarding the Aspartame website: Some of the clues that tell you to be cautious about the information on this page are: visually it is all over the place, the bold letters, the bright colours, and the liberal use of exclamation marks. But there are testimonials and doctors opinions and those can be convincing to some people.

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