Terms and Definitions

Article: a piece of writing about a particular subject that is often published as part of a larger publication, such as a book, journal, magazine, encyclopedia, etc.


Bibliography: a list of sources and citations, often found at the end of a book, journal, or encyclopedia article.

Citation: the basic identifying information that is needed to locate a specific item, such as a book or an article, either in the library or online. A citation typically contains an author, title, and other relevant publication information.

Catalog: a comprehensive list of all the bibliographic items contained in the library; the catalog arranges items systematically and also contains descriptive details for each item.

Database: a comprehensive collection of information resources, such as articles and periodicals, that is stored and accessed online. Databases usually contain resources that are related to a particular subject.

Encyclopedia: a reference source that contains information on many subjects (known as traditional multi-volume encyclopedias), or on many aspects of one subject (known as subject encyclopedias). Encyclopedia entries are typically arranged alphabetically.

Journal: a type of periodical which is considered more scholarly than a popular magazine. Journals contain scholarly articles, they are often published by academic institutions or associations, and their subject matter is specific to certain fields of study and written by experts. Examples include The American Poetry Review and the International Journal of English Studies.

Magazine: a type of periodical which is generally not scholarly in nature and which may or may not have an author. Articles in a magazine are typically geared towards the general public; they are written by authors who may or may not be an expert in the subject; and they can contain news, personal narratives, or opinion. Examples include: Time, Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, and Men’s Health.

Monograph: a book, covering a specific topic.

Peer Review: the process used by scholarly journals to assure the quality and relevance of the articles they publish. Before publication in a scholarly journal, articles must be read and approved by individuals who are experts in the field of the subject.

Periodical: a broad term that can describe anything that is published at regular intervals (i.e. periodically!). This term can include magazines, journals, newsletters, or other annual publications that are published at least 3 times a year. These are also known as serials.

Reference Work: a source of factual information intended for research or consultation on individual matters rather than continuous reading.

Serial: a broad term that can describe anything that is published at regular intervals, or in a series. The term can include magazines, journals, and newspapers. These are also known as periodicals.