

Anatomy of a journal

1. Introduction

This short activity will walk you through the different elements which form a Journal.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the activity you will be able to:

- Understand what an academic journal is
- Identify a journal article inside a journal
- Understand what a peer reviewed journal is

2. What is a journal?

Firstly, let's look at a description of a journal.

Journals are like academic magazines and cover a particular topic or area of interest and are usually published or issued on a regular basis: quarterly, monthly or even annually. Ejournals are simply online versions. As with magazines each issue of a journal contains a number of articles.

Explore more information on how journals are published - and what is published inside them – below:

Publishing

A journal publishes regularly; this could be monthly, quarterly or even annually. However, the content is entirely different each time, it is closer to a magazine than a book in this regard.

A book is published once, any new publications are:

- Reprints - where the content doesn't change
- Editions - where the content is updated

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A magazine is published regularly under the same title.

Think of a popular magazine like *Cosmopolitan*, the content is different in each new issue but the title *Cosmopolitan* is the same.

It is important to understand the differences in publishing times as the frequency of publications allows journals to cover more up to date research than a book.

Content

Journals can contain a whole range of items.

- Abstracts
- Articles
- Book reviews
- Conference Proceedings
- Editorial notes
- Opinion pieces
- ... and more!

Finding and using journal articles is a key part of academic study, we will look at how to identify the different elements that make a journal article later on in this activity.

3. Journal publication

The nature of a journal means that different content is regularly published under the same title. It can be confusing to understand which section you are accessing online.

An example of a reference to a journal article, published in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, looks like this:

Cormier, A. and Rossi, M. (2019) 'Is children's wellbeing different from adults' wellbeing?', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 49(8), pp. 1146–1168. doi: 10.1080/00455091.2019.1619354.

The numbers 49(8) after the journal title (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*) tells us is that this article written by Cormier and Rossi is in volume 49, issue (or part) 8.

4. Test yourself

Understanding that journal publication is divided into volumes and issues (sometimes called parts) can make it easier to track down articles online or in printed copies.

Look at the reference and try answering the question.

Montagna, Maria Teresa et al. (2019) 'Chocolate, "Food of the Gods": History, Science, and Human Health', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(24), p. 4960. doi: 10.3390/ijerph16244960.

Which volume of the International journal of environmental research and public health is this article published in?

- 2019
- 16
- 4960
- 24

Answer

2019 is the year of publication.

16 is the volume of the journal the article was published in – this is the correct answer!

4960 is the number of the first page this article was published on.

24 is the issue number of the journal this article was published in. Journals are subdivided into volumes, these volumes are then subdivided into issues (or parts).

5. Anatomy of a journal article

When we looked at what a journal is, we saw that journals can include more than just articles.

Reviews, editorials and discussions are all useful but for your studies, you want to focus on articles.

Journal articles are structured in a particular way, which makes them easier to identify.

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Explore the structure of a journal article by reading through the sections below:

Abstract

This is a summary of the article.

Tip: Read the abstract to determine whether or not the article is likely to focus on the topics in which you are interested

Introduction

This is the background to the article and explains why the topic has been researched for this article.

Tip: It can also be helpful to read the introduction and conclusion of an article before reading an article straight through.

Main body

This is often broken up into subsections.

For example, it may include 'Methods' which sets out the methodology they used. The final section is always the 'Conclusion'.

Tip: It is often helpful to read the conclusion as it gives an overview of the article findings.

References

At the end of the article there will be a reference list containing every article cited by the author.

Tip: You can use their references to follow-up claims and evidence made by the author; try inputting an author/title from the reference list into Library Search.

6. Peer Review

Academic journals often go through a quality check process called peer-review.

It involves a board of experts scrutinizing an academic paper before agreeing to publish it in the journal.

It is good to use peer-reviewed journals as it means the content is:

- very reliable
- conforms to high academic standards
- a suitable source for an assignment.

When searching for journal articles you can often filter your searches in Library Search or databases to look for peer-reviewed articles only.

7. Summary

You should now be able to:

- Understand what an academic journal is
- Identify a journal article inside a journal
- Understand what a peer reviewed journal is

Next Steps

- Try browsing through a journal relevant to your subject area
- Try looking for peer-reviewed journal article in your subject area.