

Anatomy of a Journal

Introduction

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

Allow approximately **10 minutes** to complete the task.

Aims

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

- Understand what an academic journal is
- Identify a journal publication
- Distinguish between peer-reviewed articles and other elements in a journal.

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.

To explore more about how to identify whole journals and sections of journals in your search read the information below about publishing, content and peer-review.

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

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 later on in this tutorial.

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.

The process of a journal

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 as it is often broken up into shorter files.

We need to be able to distinguish between this month's publication and last month's publication.

Put the sentence fragments into the correct order. (Answer in Appendix 1)

- A Journal is published regularly in...
- Individual journal articles.
- Volumes, which are often published in sections as...
- Issues, these issues contain...

Elements of a Journal

We've narrowed down to an individual issue of a journal, now we need to look at the content.

A journal contains more than just journal articles, look at the sections of the contents page (Figure 1) and identify the different elements.

Source: The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), pp.iii-vii

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of The British Society for the Philosophy of Science

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Sciences*)
Thomas Kuhn

Figure 1 - An example contents page

Sections of the Contents page:

1. Articles

Articles are listed in the contents page here.

2. Discussions

Discussion papers are listed here, these are opinion pieces.

Tip: Discussions provide good insight into current positions, disagreements and debates on a particular subject. However, discussion sections are not peer-reviewed.

3. Reviews

Reviews of recently published literature is published here.

Tip: While the authors of book reviews are usually experts on their subjects, these sections are not peer-reviewed.

4. Further Information

Details of the journal are often listed at the bottom. This is a good place to look for volume, issue and date of publication.

Anatomy of a journal article

Explore the layout of a journal article (Figure 2)

Article Title

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May 15, 2016

Abstract

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Etiam lobortis facilisis sem. Nullam nec mi et neque pharetra sollicitudin. Praesent imperdiet mi nec ante. Donec ullamcorper, felis non sodales commodo, lectus velit ultrices augue, a dignissim nibh lectus placerat pede. Vivamus nunc nunc, molestie ut, ultricies vel, semper in, velit. Ut porttitor. Praesent in sapien. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis fringilla tristique neque. Sed interdum libero ut metus. Pellentesque placerat. Nam rutrum augue a leo. Morbi sed elit sit amet ante lobortis sollicitudin. Praesent blandit blandit mauris. Praesent lectus tellus, aliquet aliquam, luctus a, egestas a, turpis. Mauris lacinia lorem sit amet ipsum. Nunc quis urna dictum turpis accumsan semper.

I. INTRODUCTION

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*A thank you or further information

erat pede. Vivamus nunc nunc, molestie ut, ultricies vel, semper in, velit. Ut porttitor. Praesent in sapien. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis fringilla tristique neque. Sed interdum libero ut metus. Pellentesque placerat. Nam rutrum augue a leo. Morbi sed elit sit amet ante lobortis sollicitudin. Praesent blandit blandit mauris. Praesent lectus tellus, aliquet aliquam, luctus a, egestas a, turpis. Mauris lacinia lorem sit amet ipsum. Nunc quis urna dictum turpis accumsan semper.

II. METHODS

Maecenas sed ultricies felis. Sed imperdiet dictum arcu a egestas.

- Donec dolor arcu, rutrum id molestie in, viverra sed diam
- Curabitur feugiat
- turpis sed auctor facilisis
- arcu eros accumsan lorem, at posuere mi diam sit amet tortor
- Fusce fermentum, mi sit amet euismod rutrum
- sem lorem molestie diam, iaculis aliquet sapien tortor non nisi
- Pellentesque bibendum pretium aliquet

1. Article title

Title of the article, not the journal title.

2. Author details

The names of the authors and any institutional affiliation they have.

Tip: You can look up the authors online for more information on the article and their research.

3. Date published

This the date the article was published, you use this date in your reference.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Main body of the article

This is often broken up into subsections.

In this example, the next section 'Methods' sets out the methodology they used.

The final section is always the 'Conclusion'.

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

7. 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.

Identifying an article

Now consider the importance of being able to identify an article from other content in a peer-reviewed journal, note down the key identifiers.

Example answer in Appendix 2.

Red Flags

By now you should be confident in your understanding of a journal and how it is structured. As you become familiar with academic study you will start to spot the same distinguishing features of a journal item which is **not** an article.

These will act as your red flags and help you filter out what you need.

Select the answers which raise a red flag as **not** being a journal article.

1. There is no abstract
2. Page length is less than 2 pages
3. The journal title is "Oxford Review of Education"
4. No publication date
5. The title is: "Joe Bloggs, Contextualisation in an academic environment"
6. More than one person is listed as an author
7. All the articles in the journal issue are by the same author

Correct answers are in Appendix 3

Summary

You should now be able to:

- Understand what an academic journal is
- Identify a journal
- Distinguish between peer-reviewed articles and other items in a journal.

End of session.

Appendix 1 – Process of a Journal

Correct sentence structure:

A Journal is published regularly in... Volumes, which are often published in sections as... Issues, these issues contain... Individual journal articles.

Appendix 2 – Identifying an Article

Question:

Now consider the importance of being able to identify an article from other content in a peer-reviewed journal, note down the key identifiers.

Model answer:

Scholarly articles always have an abstract or an introduction; the majority of articles have both. You will also find a conclusion and references at the end of the article (after the main body of text).

Be cautious of search results with the word "Review" in their title. These can be book reviews, which are not peer-reviewed. However, some journals include "Review articles" which are usually summaries of literature on a given subject rather than original research on a new area. Review articles are peer-reviewed and can be helpful for your studies.

If you are not sure from the title, scan the content and author details to help you determine if it is the original item or a review (of the research/book). The journal issue may have an abstract or introduction written by the editor, as a summary of the articles published in this particular issue. Be aware, editorials are rarely substantial or original enough to be suitable for use in assignments.

Page length is another quick thing to check. You can assume that a scholarly article will always be longer than two pages (and can be up to about 20). Anything shorter is likely to be a book review or editorial material.

Appendix 3 – Red Flags

By now you should be confident in your understanding of a journal and how it is structured.

As you become familiar with academic study you will start to spot the same distinguishing features of a journal item which is **not** an article.

These will act as your red flags and help you filter out what you need.

Feedback

Not a Red Flag- No abstract

It is good academic practice to have an abstract and is required by many journal publishers, however it is not necessary. You may find older articles without abstracts in particular, but you can still use them.

Red Flag- Page length

A journal article should contain in-depth analysis of the subject, this may be a review of the original article instead.

Not a Red Flag- The journal title is "Oxford Review of Education"

This is the title of the journal, not an article. So we can assume the journal is based on this topic. It may contain article/book reviews but we cannot be sure from the journal title.

Red Flag- No publication date

Peer-reviewed journals are published regularly, if you cannot see a date this may not have been published in an academic journal.

Red Flag- The title is: "Joe Bloggs, Contextualisation in an academic environment"

An article title should not include the authors name, this does not fit the structure of a journal article. It is likely to be a review of Joe Bloggs article on Contextualisation in an academic environment, rather than being the original article by Joe Bloggs.

Not a Red Flag- More than one person is listed as an author

Articles do usually have more than one author, it is normal practice in research.

Red Flag- All the articles in the journal issue are by the same author

If you are certain they are the author and not the journal editor, then it may be a personal publication such a blog.