Criteria to assess an article

Publication concepts

1- What is "peer review"?
"Peer review" refers to the policy of having experts in the field examine a submitted article before accepting it for publication. The peer review (or referee) process insures that the research described in a journal's articles is sound and of high quality.

2- A refereed article – may have undergone a peer review process or may have reviewed by the editorial board of the journal

Research terminology

1- Ethical clearance – approved by an Ethics Approval Committee.
2- Validity of a study – the ability of an instrument to measure what it is supposed to measure
3- Reliability of a study – an instrument’s ability to consistently and accurately measure the concepts being studied
4- Rigour – trustworthiness of documentation; credibility, transferability
5- Representativeness – degree to which the sample reflects the population from which it was drawn

Type of Journal

1. Is it scholarly or popular journal?
   a. Check the Title.
      i. Is this a scholarly or a popular journal? (See Appendix A). This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas.
   b. Note the publisher.
      i. If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.

Title of the Article

1. Does it clearly state what the research is about? Is it too short, too long, informative?

Purpose of Article

1. Why was the article written?
   a. Persuade the reader to do something?
      i. For example: vote a certain way, purchase an item, attend an event
   b. Inform the reader?
i. For example: results of a study/experiment, what happened at an event
  c. Prove something? i.e persuade you to believe one side of an issue over another
     i. For example: that a behavior is bad/good, a method works/doesn't work

2. If the article was controversial, does the author acknowledge this?

Type of Article
1. Is the article part of a conference proceedings?
2. Is it print only or online?
3. Article Length
   a. Longer articles (8+ pages) tend to be scholarly.
   b. Very short articles (1/4 page - 2 pages) are often editorials or news briefs. Nevertheless, in Science, there can be important short articles
4. Is it a review, research or opinion/perspective type of article?

Audience
1. Is the article written for the layman/consumer/patient? High school student, University student? Experts in the field?
2. Is the article written assuming discipline-specific knowledge on behalf of the reader?

Language
1. Is it full of jargon and terminology of the science or written simply for the layman/undergrad to understand?

Authors/Editors
1. Are they authorities and experts in the field? What are their academic or professional qualifications?
2. Have they published in the field or on a similar topic before?

Abstract
1. Is the abstract a succinct summary of the content?
2. Does it briefly explain the aim, justification, methods, results, importance, conclusions or recommendations in the article?

Organization and Content:
1. Is the material organised and focused?
2. Is the argument or presentation understandable?
3. Does the work update other sources, substantiate other materials you have read, or add new information?
4. Does it extensively or marginally cover your topic?

Writing Style
1. Is the publication organized logically?

Dr Shamin Renwick 2018
2. Are the main points clearly presented?
3. Do you find the text easy to read, or is it stilted or choppy?
4. Is the author's argument repetitive?

**Layout and graphics**

1. Are graphics pertinent?
2. Are figures and images captioned, clear, easily understood and relevant?
3. Do web links work?

**Scientific articles are ordered:**

1. Title
2. Author
3. Abstract
4. Introduction / Background
5. Methodology
6. Results
7. Discussion
8. Conclusion
9. Acknowledgement
10. References

**Content**

1. Does the introduction introduce the main issue and give appropriate background, rationale and purpose of the study? Was the study feasible and justified and the aim clear?
2. Was the literature review broad enough but focused on the problem being studied? Was there adequate historical, seminal and current information to provide context? Was it balanced, giving different schools of thought? Does it reveal gaps in knowledge, which this study will fill?
3. Was the research design, methodological approach, methods, study population and sampling adequately described? Is the method reliable and valid? Are the limitations and delimitations explained?
4. Was the data collected, collated and described adequately with the use of appropriate text, tables and figures?
5. Were the results interpreted in relation to the hypotheses/research questions, theoretical/conceptual frameworks (if applicable) and aims?
6. Were the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data analysis? Has the significance of the study or future work discussed?

**Bias/Objectivity** (of the publisher/author):

1. Does the article present information in an objective manner?

1. Some publications have an inherent bias that will impact articles printed in them. Is the journal:
   a. left/liberal?
   b. right/conservative?
   c. centre?
   d. an alternative press?
   e. published by a political action (PAC) group?
Objective Reasoning

1. Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda?
2. Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Assumptions should be reasonable. Note errors or omissions.
3. Are all sides of an issue represented, or is this article biased? Are several points of view presented?
4. Are the ideas and arguments advanced more or less in line with other works you have read on the same topic?
5. Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?
6. Are there any biases or assumptions that would persuade you to believe one side of an issue over another.

Currency, Maintenance and Timeliness:

Some topics, such as those in the health sciences, require current information. Other subjects, such as geology, value older material as well as current. Know the time needs of your topic and examine the timeliness of the article; is it:

1. up-to-date - Has it been updated or revised
   a. Is the article discussing current research or issues?
   b. Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information. On the other hand, topics in the humanities often require material that was written many years ago. At the other extreme, some news sources on the Web now note the hour and minute that articles are posted on their site.
2. out-of-date - Was the information recently published?
   a. When was the source published? This date is often located on the face of the title page below the name of the publisher. If it is not there, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page. On Web pages, the date of the last revision is usually at the bottom of the home page, sometimes every page.
3. Timeliness
   a. For many topics, you will require current information
   b. If you are researching a historical event, you may want to look for material published at the time of the event.
   c. Is the article written at an earlier date important to your research? - Check the article for the year any statistics or other information were collected.

Bibliography/References:

1. In general, scholarly articles have a list of works cited/references or bibliography of the resources consulted (look at the end of the article), while articles in popular magazines have no bibliography.
2. The references in this list should be in sufficient quantity and be appropriate for the content. Look for:
   a. if a bibliography/list of references exists,
   b. if the bibliography/references is short or long, selective or comprehensive,
   c. if the references are a mix of primary, secondary and tertiary sources.
   d. if the references are contemporary (fairly current) to the article or much older,
   e. if the citation style is clear and consistent.
Appendix A

**Scholarly Journals vs. Trade Magazines vs. Popular Magazines**

In academic research it is important to distinguish between scholarly, trade and popular sources.

Some very general criteria for distinguishing between the three types of sources are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Look and Layout</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Look</strong></td>
<td>Plain cover and paper.</td>
<td>Cover often depicts industrial setting.</td>
<td>Eye-catching cover and glossy paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>and Layout</strong></td>
<td>Primarily print with few pictures.</td>
<td>Glossy paper.</td>
<td>Pictures and illustrations in color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tables, graphs and diagrams are often included.</td>
<td>Pictures and illustrations in color.</td>
<td>Colorful ads for commercial products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If there are ads, they are for books or conferences.</td>
<td>Ads are mostly trade related.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
<td>Scholars, researchers, practitioners.</td>
<td>Members of a specific business, industry or organization.</td>
<td>General public.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authors</strong></td>
<td>Experts in the field (ie faculty members, researchers).</td>
<td>Magazine staff members, contributing authors or freelance writers.</td>
<td>Magazine staff members, journalists, freelance writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authors named and institutional affiliations given.</td>
<td>Authors usually named.</td>
<td>Authors may be anonymous (ie articles are unsigned).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editors</strong></td>
<td>Editorial board of outside scholars (known as peer review).</td>
<td>Editors work for publisher.</td>
<td>Editors work for publisher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishers</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publishers</strong></td>
<td>Often a scholarly or professional organization or a university press.</td>
<td>Often a trade organization.</td>
<td>Commercial, for profit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Scholarly Journals</th>
<th>Trade Magazines</th>
<th>Popular Magazines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Research projects, methodology, literary</td>
<td>Industry trends, new products or techniques, and</td>
<td>News, personalities and general interest articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Style and Language</td>
<td>Uses terminology, jargon and language of the discipline covered.</td>
<td>Uses terminology and language of trade or industry covered.</td>
<td>Easy to read, simple language used. (Aimed at the layperson.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes reader has similarly scholarly background.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference or Bibliographies</td>
<td>Articles include a bibliography, references, notes and/or works cited section</td>
<td>Articles may have short bibliographies.</td>
<td>Articles rarely include references.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Examples | *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*  
*Psychology of Women Quarterly*  
*Studies in Romanticism* | *APA Monitor*  
*Advertising Age*  
*Chilton’s Food Engineering* | *Newsweek*  
*Parents Magazine*  
*Psychology Today* |