

# Social Work: A Brief Guide for Beginning Researchers

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**Subject and Course Guides**

>> **Social Work (F)**

## Finding an Overview of a Topic: *Encyclopedias*

When researching a new topic it is often very useful to get an overview from a reference source such as an academic encyclopedia article, which will provide a summary of key issues and a selected bibliography of core readings.

- **Encyclopedia of Canadian Social Work** - Online & Print: HIL-REF HV12 .C35 2005 (main floor)
- **Encyclopedia of Social Work** - Print: HIL-REF HV12 .E56 2008 v.1-4 (main floor)
- **Blackwell Reference Online** - A collection of 350+ electronic reference books

## Finding In-depth Information: *Books*

- Search **UNB WorldCat** or **Quest**, UNB's local library catalogue.
- Note **call numbers** (shelf location: e.g., HV6017 .D38 2002) and **location codes** (library-section: e.g., HIL-STACKS).
- In the Harriet Irving Library most social work books are on the 4th floor in the range **HV1-5840**. But note that relevant material can also be found in many other locations.
- UNB WorldCat and Quest also allow you to view some full **e-books**.
- You can search **Quest's Course Reserves** for materials placed on short-term loan by your instructor.

## Finding Specific Research Studies: *Journal Articles*

- **Social Services Abstracts & Social Work Abstracts** - These two databases let you discover peer-reviewed journal articles and other types of publications. Abstracts, or brief summaries, are provided for each article. You can check if the full article is online or in the library's print holdings by clicking on the "Check for fulltext" link.

For immediate help, visit the Research Help Desk: HIL main floor, click  **Ask Us** at lib.unb.ca, or call 453-3546.

Or  **Ask the Social Work Librarian** by e-mail, or schedule an appointment (Barry Cull: bcull@unb.ca, 458-7057).

## INFO SEARCH: Evaluate Your Results!

When conducting library and information

research, you will probably find a lot of information—perhaps lists of hundreds of publications. How can you choose the best? Here are some basic things to consider.

- **Author's qualifications** (Is s/he affiliated with a university or research organization?)
- **Publisher** (Is it a university press, for example?)
- **Publication date** (Do you require the latest information, or a classic or standard text?)
- **Length** (Is the publication too brief? Too detailed?)
- Are there **references**? (Most good research publications list their sources.)
- Any **subject** or **content** details? (Abstracts, subject headings, descriptors, tables of contents?)
- **Peer review** (Unlike magazines, academic journals use this rigorous publication process—see below.)

Also consider how the publications compare with the general body of academic literature in the subject area. It is usually best to **research broadly** to ensure you find a range of perspectives which generally represent academic thinking on your topic.

## A Note About... Scholarly Journals, Popular Magazines, & Trade Journals

Articles in **scholarly journals** are important sources of current expert information, since they contain the results of recent academic research. In addition, over time their publication has a cumulative effect—scholarly journals are largely responsible for building each academic discipline's body of recorded knowledge, or *literature*.

Scholarly journals are also called *academic journals*, *research journals*, *peer-reviewed journals*, *refereed journals*, *juried journals*, or simply *journals*. Articles in scholarly journals are usually peer-reviewed, meaning they have been evaluated and edited by a group of subject experts, usually professors or other academic researchers in the specific subject area.

Journals are not like **magazines** or **newspapers**. Sometimes popular magazines or newspapers report on research that has been published in journals, but popular articles themselves are not normally the best sources of information since they usually have no peer-review process, and therefore provide little guarantee that their information is reliable.

How can you tell the difference between journals and magazines or newspapers? To begin with, scholarly journal titles usually contain words such as *journal*, *bulletin*, *review*, and *quarterly*. But there are several more differences:

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Scholarly Journals</u>	<u>Popular Magazines and Newspapers</u>
Purpose:	report independent research findings	provide information at a profit: sell ads
Audience:	scholars, researchers, professionals	general public
Author:	from research organizations (often PhDs)	no credentials necessary
Tone:	formal, scientific, technical	informal
Validation:	references or citations	no references provided
Layout:	long articles, often mostly text	shorter, many illustrations
Availability:	academic libraries, internet	bookstores, newsstands, internet
Examples:	<i>Canadian Journal of Sociology</i>	<i>Macleans</i>

A third category of periodicals, called **trade journals**, are found in many subjects, especially the professions, such as nursing, criminal justice, social work, education, and business administration. Trade journals can also be called *professional journals*, *practitioner's journals*, or *trade magazines*.

Trade journals are not like scholarly journals or popular magazines, but they can be viewed as falling between the two. They are intended for working professionals or managers in a particular field. Articles from trade journals tend to be readable, and they often point to specific research findings, but they may not be as reliable as scholarly journal articles. Examples include *Corrections Today* for correctional professionals and *Educational Leadership* for education administrators.