

Popular Press Sources

Popular press sources are magazines, newspapers, and books intended to inform or entertain general audiences. They sometimes feature lavish illustrations, rarely include citations, and often include advertisements.

Author, Audience, Purpose

Authors are usually journalists and paid professional writers.

Mass-market magazines, newspapers, and books tend to address broad audiences, but many popular press sources address a specific demographic or marketing niche.

The purpose of these sources is usually to entertain and inform while maintaining profitability by selling advertising space.

Reliability

Standards for fact-checking, journalistic ethics, fairness, and balance vary considerably between publications and over time. Generally, there is some kind of editorial process, but errors, misrepresentations, and outright fraud are surprisingly common.

Examples

- *The New York Times*
- *Popular Science*
- *Time Magazine*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *Psychology Today*
- *National Geographic*

Uses in the Research Process

Popular press sources are often the first source of information on a topic, making them valuable in the research process. Popular press sources can inspire the exploration of new topics. They can give background information about a topic or question. For some current events on which there are few scholarly articles, popular press articles may be the primary source of information. Popular press sources can also be used as primary sources which document history or demonstrate the way that mass media represent a phenomenon.

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Tips for Identifying Popular Press Sources

Publication Type

- Magazines and newspapers often have many advertisements for products not directly related to the content, though popular press books rarely include advertisements.

Genre

- The writing is often more informal than in scholarly writing. There are rarely citations or references in magazines and newspapers, but popular press books sometimes have limited citations. Popular press publications rarely provide a formal report on original research and consequently lack a thorough literature review, methods section, etc.

How do I Find Popular Press Sources

The *LexisNexis* database is great for finding newspaper articles. *ProQuest Research Library* can be good for newspaper or magazine articles. Many popular press magazines and newspapers have a web presence, and popular press books are often available in libraries or bookstores.

Language

- These sources are usually written with language accessible to a broad audience.

Editorial Oversight

- Publishing houses and editors build their audiences based on reputations, but oversight is often less rigid than in other genres. In the case of journalism, there is often a group of fact checkers who analyze the articles piece-by-piece, but this is not a foolproof method, especially if the journalist has been sloppy or fraudulent.