

Evaluating Resources—Books

Clues for Identifying Scholarly Books

These clues will go a long way towards assisting you in differentiating between books intended for the scholar and not a general audience.

A good clue to a scholarly resource is its publisher. Books from publishers specializing in the field will tend to be of better quality than those that don't. An examination of the publisher's Web site can be extremely valuable in discovering the type of material predominantly published by them. Look for "About" and a "Mission Statement" and see if you can find how long they've been in business? Do they provide services to academia?

Books published by a university press will tend to be more academically sound than those published by trade publishers, especially if the institution has a good reputation in the field covered by the work.

Another way to identify a scholarly book is to investigate the author. Is the author an authority in a discipline? Try to find a biography on the individual. Are there social media tools or professional networking sites you can use to find information about the author? Is the author listed as a reference or citation in databases or google scholar?

Check out, or investigate the book. Examine the book to check the scholarship:

Accuracy: how does the information compare to that of other works on the subject?

Biases: all authors are biased, but scholarly works tend to reflect the results of research in the field and not propagandize.

Preface, Introduction, Table of Contents, Conclusion and Index: most scholarly works will have several, if not all, of these components. Consider also how well the author lives up to his/her claims indicated in the preface, introduction and conclusion.

Audience appropriate: a scholarly work will be written to those with some knowledge of or ability to understand the topic under discussion.

Graphics, Charts, Illustrations, etc.: many scholarly works will have graphs, charts, illustrations, etc.

A Book Review is another tool to use to evaluate the scholarship of a book. Databases, like JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest are good places to check and find Book Reviews.

Subject Specific Annotated Bibliographies can also prove useful for finding academic books. To find these in the library, search the topic needed and the term "bibliography" in an academic database like JSTOR, EBSCO or ProQuest.