What is peer review?

Have you ever watched American Idol on television? If so, you know that it’s a singing contest where every year, thousands of people try-out for a chance to make it to *the big time*. Randy, Paula, Kara and the ever cranky Simon are the expert panel of judges who determine whether contestants go to Hollywood or are rejected. On American Idol, you, the audience (or peers) are the experts who determine which individuals meet your criteria for best performer. Similarly, a panel of peer experts reject scholarship that doesn’t meet certain criteria.

Many scholarly journals use peer review before an article is published. Peer review occurs when other experts in the author’s field critically evaluate a draft of the article. Peer-reviewed journals are scholarly journals that only publish articles that have passed through this review process. Sometimes a peer-reviewed journal is called a scholarly or refereed journal. Not all scholarly journals go through a peer-review process, though. The peer-review process assures that articles are of high quality, are credible, and are a contribution to the scholarship in that field.

Where do rejected American Idol contestants go to perform after a failed try-out? Back to singing karaoke or to their garage band. Where do people get their work published if it does not meet a peer-reviewed criteria? The web, or perhaps a popular magazine.
How do I find peer-reviewed articles?

Many databases will allow you to limit your results to peer-reviewed or scholarly articles. Most databases allow limiting by publication type. Most databases, including the databases in Marvel, EBSCOhost, and Proquest (shown below) will allow you to limit your results to only peer-reviewed or scholarly journals.

- **Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals**

Deciding if an article came from a scholarly or popular source can often be tricky. Here are some things to look for:

- Credentials such as PhD or a university affiliation after the author’s name
- You may find biographical information establishing the author’s knowledge of the subject which lists their credentials
- Look for an abstract that summarizes the main points of the article
- There will be footnotes or a bibliography at the end of the article which lists their sources of information
- Specialized vocabulary may be used within the article which indicates expert knowledge of the subject
- Scholarly articles are longer (several pages) than popular articles

If you are still unsure if an article you have is peer-reviewed, locate the journal publication information online (or in the front or the back of the journal) and look for the instructions to authors’ page. This will describe what criteria have to be met in order for an article to be published. This information is also provided in databases. Usually you can click on the journal title (usually found under the ‘source’) and find more publication information.