

HOW TO FIND SCHOLARLY BOOKS

You've probably already seen how easy it is to find and access peer-reviewed journal articles through one of our research databases. But your assignment stipulates you also need to find scholarly or academic books.

Those aren't as easy to determine, so I'm going to give you three things to note when searching for scholarly books in the library's collection.

The first is the publisher: many scholarly books are published by a recognized university press. It's safe to assume that if you see a university press as the publisher, the book is a scholarly one. But there are many publishers that publish scholarly books that aren't university presses. Here are a just a few. So, we need to know a few more things that identify scholarly books.

The second characteristic to look at is the documentation - how the author documents sources. Scholarly books use citations or detailed footnotes in the text, and include an extensive bibliography at the end of each chapter, or at the end of the book.

This documentation indicates the author has done detailed research in the topic at hand and is interested in communicating where they have drawn on other authors' information sources to add to their argument. This is one of the hallmarks of scholarly communication. Popular or non-scholarly books usually don't use such extensive documentation. Additionally, they often contain a lot of visual information as well as text.

A third way of determining if a book is scholarly is to find out who the author is. A scholarly author is a recognized expert in the field. Scholarly or academic authors often have advanced degrees, like a doctoral degree, and are very often based at a university, college, or research institute. Scholarly authors use scholarly books to communicate the findings of their research to other experts in their field, or the broader scholarly community.

Now that we've identified 3 key features of scholarly books, you might be wondering: aren't all the books in the Laurier Library scholarly?

While the library has many scholarly books, we also carry a number of popular books, such as graphic novels, and works of literary fiction that would not be considered scholarly. These works are collected by the library to support the research and teaching interests of our faculty and students. To make sure you know whether a book is scholarly or not, you really need to consult the book itself and look for the three characteristics of scholarly books.

And to recap, the three main things we want to ask are: who is the Publisher, does the work include extensive documentation to support their claims, and is the author a recognized expert in their field?

It's important to remember, though, that for any book you use in a research assignment, the most important question to ask yourself is does the book give you the information you need to answer your research question?

If you're still uncertain, please ask one of the subject librarians for additional help

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus

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