

Analyzing Magazine Articles

What Is a Magazine?

A magazine is a regularly published collection of articles that might focus on any topic in general or on topics of interest to a specific group, such as sports fans or music fans or home decorators. Magazines might be published weekly, monthly, semi-monthly, or only several times a year. More commonly, magazines are published weekly or monthly. Examples of magazines include *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Car and Driver*, *Interview*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Elle*, *GQ*, and *Sports Illustrated*.

General Characteristics of Magazine Articles

Articles in magazines are typically written for the general reading public and don't reflect in-depth research (an exception might be an investigative report written in a news magazine that involved weeks or months of research and interviews to complete). Most magazine articles do not list references and are written by the magazine's own staff writers. In general, magazine articles are easy to read, are fairly brief in length, and may include illustrations or photographs. Magazines also rely heavily on advertisements targeted to consumers as a source of revenue.



When To Use Magazine Articles

While most academic research is better done using articles from scholarly/academic journals, magazine articles can also be of use in a variety of situations. For example, a research paper that aims to compare and contrast conservative and liberal viewpoints on immigration reform in the United States would most likely rely heavily on articles published in magazines that reach a broad audience rather than just an academic audience. There are numerous publications that cater to particular political leanings, both conservative and liberal, and having little or no political bent. For example, the magazine *National Review* covers a multitude of topics of current interest and addresses them from a conservative perspective; the magazine *American Prospect* covers topics of current interest from a liberal perspective; while the magazine *Christian Science Monitor* generally takes an unbiased approach in its articles. The researcher looking to contrast the conservative and liberal stances on immigration reform would want to compare articles and editorials published in the *National Review* and *American Prospect* and similar magazines in order to get a feel for the differences in opinions surrounding this issue.

Magazines are also excellent sources for locating reviews of books, movies, drama, concerts, music, etc. While scholarly journals also publish book reviews for academic publications, magazines like *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist* are more likely to provide broad coverage of publications in a variety of genres ranging from the very scholarly and academic to the popular. Journals like *The Musical Quarterly* will provide in-depth analysis of keyboard techniques in Beethoven sonatas, but magazines like *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* will provide up-to-date reviews of the latest album release by the British group Coldplay.

A political science scholar who is researching the impact of the popular press on voting behavior in the last presidential election will need to include newspapers and magazines as source materials for the research. Scholarly analysis of voting will certainly play a big role in the research, but, in order to analyze the popular material that the average voter might have been exposed to, the researcher will need to survey articles that were published in magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *National Review* and in newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Assessing the Potential Value of a Magazine Article: What To Look For?

While there are many things to consider when assessing the value of a magazine article, some primary considerations include:

The type of magazine -- The majority of magazines published for consumers have a particular focus. For example, *Sports Illustrated* is published for sports enthusiasts; *Rolling Stone* is published for those interested in popular culture and popular music; *Cosmopolitan's* target audience is women with a particular interest in fashion, relationships, and health; *Car and Driver* targets those who are keenly interested in automobiles. While the focus of many magazines will be obvious from their titles, some are not so easily discerned. In those cases and even just to check up on the obvious, publications like *Magazines for Libraries* and websites such as Ulrichsweb.com will be useful in determining what type of publication is under consideration.

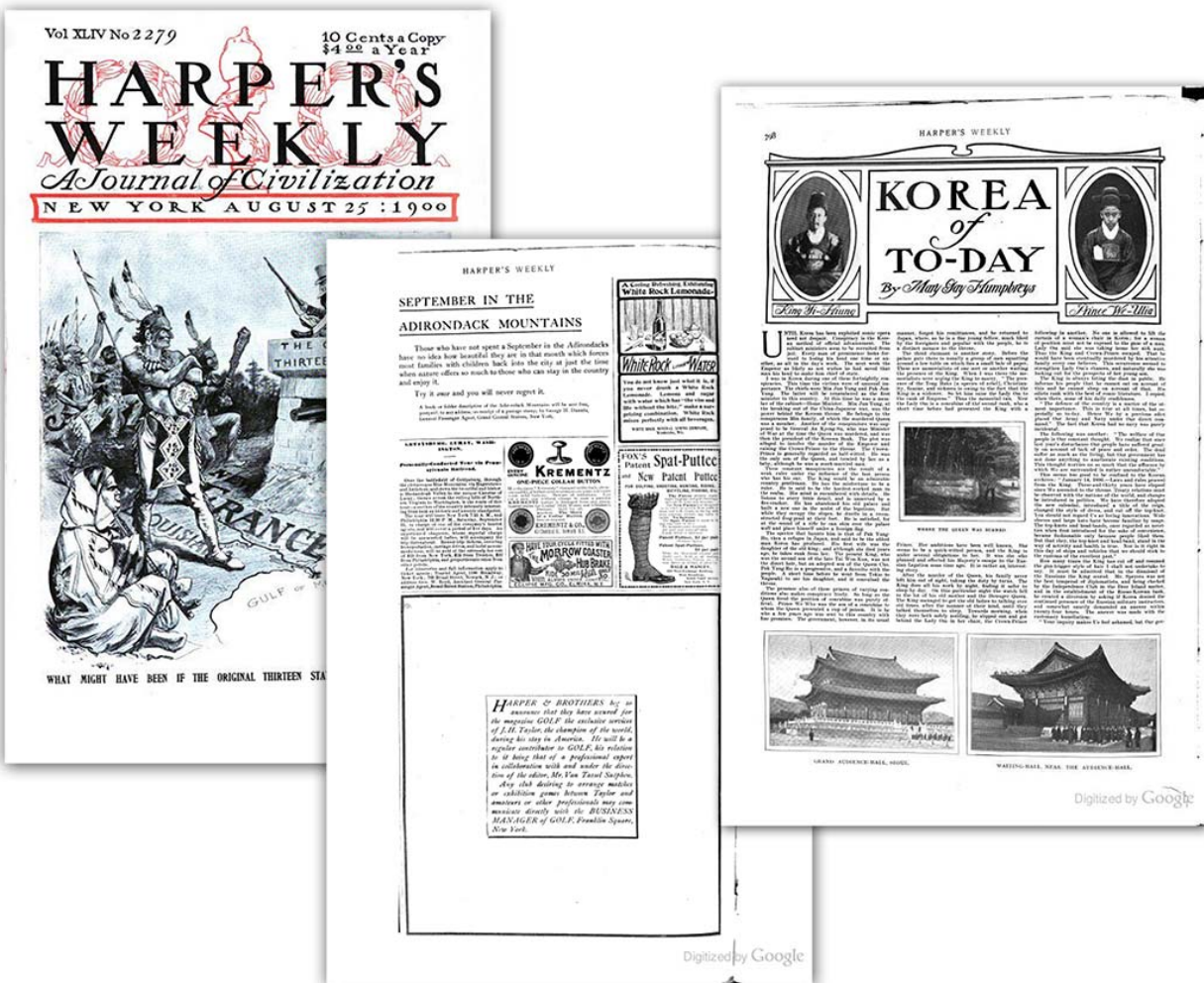
Audience -- To whom is the article targeted? Is the article written as an item of general interest? Is the article targeted toward a specific ethnic group or gender? Is the article intended for a particular age group? Is the article written with a particular political leaning in mind? Understanding something of the intended audience will help a researcher determine if the article is appropriate.

Authorship -- Most magazine articles are written by staff writers who work for the magazines. Some articles might be contributed by other writers not directly employed by the magazine. Editorial and analytical pieces included in a magazine will likely be contributed by one or more of the editorial staff of the magazine. While not all magazine articles provide "bylines," many do. And while an author's qualifications and background might not be specifically listed at the beginning of the article, a researcher can easily check to see what other articles the author has written by scanning a library database. Knowing more about the author will help the researcher understand more about the article under consideration.

Article date -- Is the article's date of concern? For example, with the study of voting patterns referenced above, it will be important to gather and analyze articles leading up to the election, not those that appear following the election. This might seem obvious, but since most articles will be gathered from library databases which might or might not organize materials according to date it will be crucial for the researcher to make sure that the articles are clearly within the appropriate time period.

What to keep track of to adequately cite a magazine article:

- Article title
- Author's name
- Magazine title
- Date of the issue (some magazines might also use volumes and numbers)
- Inclusive pages for the article
- From where the article was retrieved (print, web, library database, etc.)
- Date when the article was retrieved (especially if it was found on the open Internet)



Example of a magazine. *Harper's Weekly*, volume 44, number 2279, (August 25, 1900). Notice the abundance of illustrations and photos and the advertisements. (Images retrieved from Google Books)

Reading by Jim Alderman. Updated March 2014.