

FINDING, OBTAINING, AND EVALUATING CURRENT RESEARCH ARTICLES

by Jessica Hinkson Desmarais

Faced with limited resources and the need for effective programs, campus and community prevention professionals are looking for evidence-based strategies to implement as part of comprehensive prevention programs. To do this they must first know how to find and evaluate research articles . . . but where to begin? Staying up to date on the latest research is easy once you identify the appropriate tools.

The Higher Education Center compiles recently published research on alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention and intervention topics on a monthly basis and posts that information on its [Recently Published Research](#) Web page. Articles in these compilations are evaluated by subject area experts who then capture citations relevant to campus-based alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention, with a special focus on research that identifies evidence-based and other promising strategies. [HEC/News](#) subscribers receive alerts automatically about this recently published research. In addition, the Higher Education Center research archive (<http://www.higheredcenter.org/services/assistance/lit-review>) is available on its Web site.

Campus-based prevention professionals also have access to academic databases that provide journal article citations, which in many cases are available in full-text formats. These databases also can be configured to send articles that fit designated criteria straight to an e-mail in-box. Reference librarians can help narrow and refine search terms: just save the search and set the frequency of updates.

Many scholarly journals provide table-of-contents alerts to interested parties through their Web sites or through online databases, such as EBSCOhost, and are available through most academic and public libraries. Fifteen of the [most common sources](#) of college alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention articles are listed on the Higher Education Center's Web site.

Once found, there are several ways to obtain full-text access to articles. Try searching Google or Google Scholar using the article's title in quotation marks. While this search sometimes yields the full article, also check the Center for College Health and Safety's Web page on [finding full-text articles](#) for a number of additional tips.

When evaluating a research article, there are several key questions to ask:

- What type of journal published the article? Articles in scholarly journals, such as the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, are subject to peer review or other types of evaluation prior to publication, which provides some assurance that the article has been subject to examination by external researchers with subject matter expertise. While general interest or popular periodicals, such as *Popular Science*, may be great sources for background information, the content is not as carefully reviewed as articles published in a [peer-reviewed or refereed journal](#).

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- Does the journal publisher or author have a discernable bias? Learning more about the publisher and author's employer and funding source may help to identify conflicts of interest and subtle treatment of the data or information being presented.
- What is the purpose of the article? The purpose should be clearly stated in the abstract.
- Is the article comprehensive and are the illustrations relevant? A thorough, well-written article should include synopses of relevant work on the topic being discussed.
- Was the literature review or research conducted recently? Keep in mind that journal articles generally take from several months to several years to be published, depending on the number of revisions required and the publisher's production schedule.
- Is the reference list complete and up to date? If the latest citation date is more than five years old, the author may not have included recent research in the study being reported.

More information on how to evaluate research articles can be found online through academic libraries and through sources that include the University of North Florida's Web page [Scholarly Journals: What Are They? When Should I Use Them?](#) and Colorado State University's Web page [How to Evaluate Journal Articles](#).

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