

Today we're going to show you how to dig a pit in your basement, so deep nobody can escape. Silence. Just kidding! We're actually going to show you a gross oversimplification of the information cycle. Ready? Okay!

It starts with news. These are the facts (or complete fabrications) we get every day through popular channels like Internet news articles, newspapers, magazines, or singing telegram. This stuff is really current, often up to the day or minute. The way you view this stuff doesn't matter. News is news, whether it is on video or audio, electronic text or paper, or coming from the voice inside your head. Sure, some news sources are better than others, but we don't care about that right now.

Scholarly articles is where things start to get complicated. Like getting a date if you're ugly. These things take a long time to research and write, so the information they contain could be six or more months out of date. What it will be, however, is detailed, specific, and accurate. Like the excuses I give my friends when they catch me arguing with my cat. Like news, there is no difference in quality between an article on your computer screen and a paper article in the library.

Academic books occur at the end of the cycle. Books take years to write and publish. Instead of diving in and explaining every bloody detail about a topic, a book ties together all of that super-specific information into new ways of looking at something. When we use the word book, we don't just mean something made out of paper with a front and back cover—we mean a source of information that does what we described here. Sure, it might be in paper, but it just as likely to be electronic.

Each stage in the cycle uses the previous stage to create new knowledge, so no one stage in the cycle is more important than any other stage. They are all necessary parts of a greater whole. At least that's what the voice in my head tells me