

Clues to quality of journals

Experts do not always agree on the most appropriate place to publish or present a particular piece of research, but all agree that **this choice is important**, especially for early-career authors, both

- a) to **meet professional goals**, such as tenure review and grant funding, and
- b) to **reach the audience** you want to reach by publishing or presenting.

Fake/ predatory/ fraudulent journals reinforce APCs but without Peer Review & don't provide publishing services e.g. quality control, licensing, indexing into indexing services/databases, content preservation and might not be full Open Access. Those journals are not limited to the open access model; there are reports about it also in the world of traditional journal publishing.

So, how to avoid publishing in a journal with low quality or fake journal?

1. **Ask for Advice regarding experiences with journal/ publisher:** ask experts ([contact us](#)) and/or research colleagues or ask via research network (hints for dubious ones: poor grammar, same website with different URLs, dead links, spam invitation mails, no or fake contact/ physical location, physical address displayed & correct? see [12](#))
2. **Journal's name congruent with mission & geographical** ("Swiss", "European" → congruent with editors/papers? or topical relationship (content resp. origin should meet the journal's name) (dubious: name similar to a well-known one)
3. **Check the Impact:** use following tools for getting an impression of the impact

a) JIF* [Journal Citation Reports](#) claimed JIF correct? Check [JCR](#) (no bogus impact factor/ self-calculated? See [6](#))

Number of cites during current year to articles published in previous two years

Number of citable articles published in previous two years

= Impact Factor

! Covered articles unclear: normally without Editorials, Letters...

O

Journal's Impact Factor does not show perfectly the relevance/ quality of an article

1) Search by:	2) Type search term:
ISSN ▼	Enter words from journal title or ISSN (view list of full journal titles)
	0975-9158
	<input type="button" value="SEARCH"/>

Search Examples:

Full Journal Title: Enter JOURNAL OF CELLULAR PHYSIOLOGY or JOURNAL OF CELL* ([more examples](#))

Abbreviated Journal Title: Enter J CELL PHYSIOL or J CELL* ([more examples](#))

Title Word: Enter CELLULAR or CELL* ([more examples](#))

ISSN: Enter 0021-9541 or other ISSN ([more examples](#))

b) [Scopus' Journal Analyzer](#) that we also purchased for such reasons (for details see tutorial: https://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/14181/supporthub/scopus)

c) [SCImago Journal & Country Rank](#)

Please keep in mind that not all journals are listed due to a) discipline, b) the journal's age or other factors. Additionally, alternative metrics measure the relevance in Web2.0 / Social Media & Google:

d) [Alternative Metrics](#) (analyzing the mentions in Social Web etc.)

e) [Google Scholar Metrics](#) may also be helpful (for authors' impact: GoogleScholar uses h5-index)

All in all, please keep in mind that the **Journal's Impact Factor does not show perfectly the relevance/ quality of an article**, see warning sign above and ref. [q](#)

Quality criteria: JOURNAL

4. **Scope & audience** (e.g. researchers): should be well-defined, scope is either transdisciplinary (e.g. Nature, Science) or specified? (corresponding with the articles' content?), geographical scope mentioned? (corresponding with editors/papers?), primary **audience** named? Journal has no bogus certification to claim quality e.g. [bogus SIS](#)
5. **Size/ Subscribers:** how many copies sold? How many university libraries have a subscription? (ca. 2500 top universities worldwide, check [EZB](#) for European subscribers)
6. **ISSN & JIF displayed** (*no "Index Copernicus Value", a dubious value, or other misleading metrics): stated ISSN /JIF existing & correct? → [check ISSN](#) & [JIF via JCR](#) (a new journal can't have a JIF: if claimed= false JIF)
7. **Check the directories** [ZDB](#) / [EZB](#) / [DOAJ](#): a) [journal](#) referenced in journals' database/ Zeitschriften-datenbank [ZDB](#) (comprises all printed and electronic journals)?
b) an [eJournal](#) should be listed in the Electronic Journals' Library [EZB](#) (shows access info)
c) an [Open Access Journal](#) should be listed in the [DOAJ](#) /Directory of OA Journals
If a journal is **NOT** indexed in these directories, you should look **very critically** to it. *We suggest asking colleagues like us (see [1](#)) who are familiar with these issues for several years
8. **Publication history:** long-established = bigger outreach, consistently/ regularly published? **Avoid journals** with "light content"-issues or pseudo-science content/ journal and avoid journals that claim to be the "leading journal"
9. **Archive of past issues:** displayed? **unusually small/ large/ variable numbers of articles?** Issues/articles complete/missing?
10. **Open or closed** (=behind paywalls) **access:** access ways stated see [e](#)? **dubious:** copyproof & locked PDF for complicating plagiarism checks, crawling e.g. via search engines not allowed, see [o](#), **openly accessible for an extra fee?**=HybridOA (/OpenChoice) → HybridOA is not supported by funders/ institutional publication fund, more details at [Open Access](#)
11. **Gold Open Access** (via Article Processing Charges APC) or **Green OA** (deposit in repository): check in case of [GoldOA](#): which fee & can costs be covered by a funder? Is there a waiver for people of low-income countries? check [GreenOA](#)-possibility: deposit in repository with embargo or instantly? (Check [Sherpa/ROMEO](#))

PUBLISHER

12. **Check the Publisher e.g. via** [Sherpa/ROMEO](#): Publisher/Journal does not hide who they are? Is Publisher well-known (not only claimed? see [n](#)) & run by an important scholarly body (=prestigious journal → might be pretended & not a real NPO) or commercially-run? Are duplicated editorial boards in different journals? see [n](#) What else does it promote (non-academic or blinking ads?) /produce? Contact is journal/publisher-affiliated (no @gmx etc., no contact form? see [n](#)) and physical address displayed & **correct?** (check via [GoogleMaps](#) (predatory publishers use a virtual office or proxy business as physical address see [n](#)) & check via [wholsIP](#))
 - **Editorial Board incl. roles/responsibilities:** displayed & true? Is editorial board made up? made-up names/ positions/ without persons' knowledge/permission? Editorial Board has sufficient members (more than 10members) Geographical diversity (esp. with international claim)? Are they well-known in your research area (do they

PUBLISHER

- work in your academic field & are associated with strong academic programs/ institutions? **Details given & correct?** & still actively-publishing important cited papers? (One of the [quality metrics for scholars](#) is the h-index, see [this Scopus blogpost](#)), **Publisher's founder not part of all journals' Editorial Boards?** Editors not publishing in their own journal? see [n](#))
- **Transparency in Publishing operations:** Publishing operations & manuscript handling must be well-described (=high ethical/ professional standards) see [u](#): a) **submission process**, b) **Peer review**, c) **author fees**, d) **authors/ reviewers guidelines** d) **publ. contract**, e) **digital preservation of published content** (if not: papers disappear), f) **copyright policy** poorly written or missing or misleading claims? → predatory see [n](#)), copyright transfer less desirable
 - **Correction/ retraction:** good copyediting & proofreading? Correction-rate compared to similar journals? Retracted articles existing and what are the retraction reasons? → frequent corrections/errata=no thorough editorial practices, many retractions=ineffective strategies against fraud or malpractice, removed papers without statement=stealth retraction
 - **Sufficient resources/ strategies against misconduct/ fraud:** retraction policy/reporting guideline? e.g. plagiarism-screening-tools if insufficient, the journal(s) suffer from plagiarism, self-plagiarism, image manipulation etc.
 - **Publication Fees** (& no submission/handling fee=author has to pay even if paper is not accepted see [g](#)): clearly stated fees or charges (e.g. pages, colored images) & can be easily found? (median fees see [j](#)) predatory journal: \$100, OA-journal: \$1866, subscription-based: \$300), dubious: APC-payment before submission, options for prepaying APCs for future articles), not too focused on the payment of fees? **In case of OA Journal:** Many OA- journals use an "author pays"-procedure/ GoldOA (see [i](#)) currently unofficial HZI's publication fund's criteria on [Open Access](#), Publication fees doesn't mean it's a low-quality/ fraudulent journal but high APCs/ article processing charges are the motivation for recent frauds and "fake" journals.
 - Publishers should be an **OASPA-Member** following OASPA's [Membership Criteria](#) see [t](#)) & [u](#))
 - **Publisher's operations:** publisher=for-profit or non-profit? (falsely claimed, relationships with other for-profit companies hidden or obscured? Links to legitimate associations to borrow legitimacy), Publisher began operation with only a few journals (dubious: large fleet from the beginning, template to quickly create each journal's home page see [j](#))
 - **No spam mails:** asking for peer-review, submitting papers (done also by good ones!) or for suggesting reviewers
 - **Content indexed in legitimate abstracting & indexing services (Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, JCR):** claimed indexes correct? → check claims/resources (might be falsely mentioned to rise submissions see [n](#))

ARTICLES

13. **Check the quality of published articles** by evaluating various aspects (e.g. author, purpose...) - for details see [h](#)) guide [Check the relevance of information sources](#)
 - **Articles meeting disciplinary standards:** Are the articles within scope & meeting discipline's standards? Publication date & article's pages/ID stated? see [e](#)) (dubious: same article appears in more than one journal)
 - **DOI:** Articles have DOI's (Digital Object Identifier e.g. <https://doi.org/10.1000/182>) for accessing the articles permanently (dubious: DOI indicated for a journal and not for each article or no DOI available)
 - **Rights for (Re-)Use & Copyright:** clearly stated & well-written? licence information available? (if not → dubious), articles must be sufficiently protected from unauthorized modifications or falsifications **In case of OA-Journal:** articles published with [licence CC-BY](#)? (Dubious: "complete OA" stated but not all articles are OA → journal publishes not according to its stated copyright)
 - **Do you usually read the journal?** If not: publish in a journal which you/your colleagues do read

SUBMITTING see also criteria in PUBLISHER

14. **Acceptance/Rejection Rates:** acceptance rate included in the "information for authors" area of the journal or journal homepage (or homepage of the publishing society)? (→ Normally, higher quality journals have lower acceptance rates and higher rejection rates. Inverted U-relationship –medium rejection rates are best for authors, **low rejection rates = journal is desperate or unknown and thus will also accept weak content**)
15. **Peer Review & Author/ Reviewer Guidelines** (original/copied?): Review type: single(=inadequate)/double/triple-blind/ open-peer review? Post-publication peer review? → review type should be stated see [o](#)) Review quality & duration? should be conducted by at least 2 reviewers=experts in specific topic (dubious: reviewers suggested by author see [q](#)) Details in: editorial policies, instructions for authors/ reviewers, "about this journal", article preparation instructions
16. **Time from submission to decision:** appropriate time (dubious: rapid publishing promised)
17. **Time from submission to publication online:** appropriate time, e.g. some months to 1 year → indicates well-organized production process (dubious: rapid publishing promised)
18. **ePublication approach:** "continuous online" publication (=published as final versions)? Articles arranged into issues? TOC & search/browse-features available see [e](#))? Published in print or digital only? (Please note: printed issues are also necessary due to German copyright-regulations as document delivery (e.g. by libraries) for a scientific purpose is only allowed via copying from a printed issue), "Online first" offered? (reaches potential audiences faster)
19. **Time from ePublication to Printed issue:** appropriate time, desirable journals have longer timings with print issues due to many excellent articles (some have publication gaps of two years), long backlog might indicate over-acceptance by the editors
20. **Reference style:** How standard is the reference style used by the journal? Does it have an own reference style which is also offered in a reference manager? (if not or not with all required aspects, use a nearly similar one) Use a reference manager like Endnote or Mendeley to get the paper in the same basic approach as the journal.
21. **Article type** (what types offered?) & **length limit:** what is the maximum length? (length can vary: research notes (=2000+ words) to full article, longer articles might lead to additional costs) Is the favored article type a higher-rated or lower-rated for the so-called "performance-related bonuses"/"Leistungsorientierte Mittelvergabe"?
22. **Similar articles:** Do articles exist with similar content/ theories/ results? The journal should cover papers dealing with similar topics but not so much so that a submitted paper might be rejected based on those reasons
23. **Additional features offered?** (See below)

23. Additional features offered?

- Altmetric scores offered?** (Altmetrics / Alternative metrics show social media scores e.g. how many shares) If so, are they displayed for each article or for the whole journal? → high altmetric scores will help one's own article to be more visible
- Linking to other output possible (e.g. data repository...)?** If so, readers are able to view the full set of research output
- Download data & "cited by" offered?** Those are useful: ongoing high scores indicate a strong and engaged online readership

Those criteria are also summed up and gathered from the 4 below and the references listed in "Further information":

- Beall, Jeffrey: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170103170856/https://scholarlyoa.com/2012/11/30/criteria-for-determining-predatory-open-access-publishers-2nd-edition/>
- Cabells International: <http://www.cabells.com/blacklist-criteria> (Cabells' blacklist only for subscribers)
- Washington University's check list: <http://libguides.wustl.edu/c.php?g=47124&p=302704>
- Crawford, Walt: *Journals, "Journals" and Wannabes: Investigating the List* <https://citesandinsights.info/civ14i7.pdf> (This checklist's design is based on Crawford's aspects in Crawford's article)

If something is missing, please let us know: Bibliothek@... We hope this checklist helps in evaluating a journal/ publisher.

- In case, you are unsure regarding a journal's quality we are looking forward to assist you. We are also interested in your experiences regarding rather dubious manners of a specific publisher/ journal! Via sharing also other scientists can benefit.

Further information:

- Beall's List: *Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers* – URL: <http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/> resp. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161122185726/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>
- Butler, Declan: *Sham journals scam authors*. – In: *Nature* - Vol. 495 (2013) 7442: pp. 421–422. – URL: <http://www.nature.com/news/sham-journals-scam-authors-1.12681>
- Butler, Declan: *Investigating journals: The dark side of publishing* – In: *Nature* – Vol. 495 (2013) Special issue: pp. 433–435. – URL: <http://www.nature.com/news/investigating-journals-the-dark-side-of-publishing-1.12666>
- Crawford, Walt: *Journals, "Journals" and Wannabes: Investigating the List* – In: *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* - Vol. 14 (2014) 7 – URL: <http://citesandinsights.info/civ14i7.pdf>
- DOAJ: Information for publishers <https://www.doaj.org/publishers>
- Dunleavy, Patrick: *Submitting to a journal commits you to it for six weeks to six months (or longer) – so choose your journal carefully*. (2016) - <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/11/10/choose-your-journal-carefully/>
- Eriksson, Stefan; Helgesson, Gert: *The false academy : predatory publishing in science and bioethics* – In: *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* Vol 20 (2017), 2 – pp. 163–170 - URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11019-016-9740-3>
- HZI Library: *Check the relevance of information sources* – HZI Library – URL: <https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliothek-open.de/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YvFe8nEOB04%3d&tabid=81&portalid=1&mid=625&language=de-DE>
- HZI Criteria for financing articles via Publication Fund at page "Open Access": <https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliothek-open.de/zeitschriften/openaccess.aspx>
- HZI Library: *Hijacked Journals and Predatory Publishers*. <http://intranet-hzi/W/BIB/News%20Bibliothek/Hijacked%20Journals%20and%20Predatory%20Publishers.doc>
- Jalalian, Mehrdad; Mahboobi, Hamidreza: *Hijacked Journals and Predatory Publishers: Is There a Need to Re-Think How to Assess the Quality of Academic Research?* – In: *Walailak Journal of Science and Technology* - Vol. 11 (2014) 5 - pp. 389–394. – URL: <http://wjst.wu.ac.th/index.php/wjst/article/view/1004>
- Laine, Christine, Winkler, Margaret A.: *Identifying predatory or pseudo-journals* – In: *Biochem Med (Zagreb)* Vol. 27(2017) 2: pp. 285–291 – URL: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/183380?lang=en>
- Shamseer, Larissa et al.: *Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison* – In: *BMC Medicine* (2017) <http://bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9>
- Siler, Kyle: *Demarcating Legitimate and Predatory Academic Publishing: The Influence of Status on Institutional Logic Conflicts*. SocArXiv. June 30, 2019. doi:10.31235/osf.io/6r274
- Strinzel: List of criteria by whitelist or blacklist, topic, concept, and verifiability (Table S1) <https://mbio.asm.org/content/mbio/10/3/e00411-19/DC1/embed/inline-supplementary-material-1.xlsx?download=true> – In: Strinzel M, Severin A, Milzow K, Egger M. 2019. Blacklists and whitelists to tackle predatory publishing: a cross-sectional comparison and thematic analysis. *mBio* 10:e00411-19
- The future of publishing: A new page*. A special issue of *Nature* looks at the transformation taking place in scientific publishing. – In: *Nature* – Vol. 495 (2013) 425 – URL <http://www.nature.com/news/the-future-of-publishing-a-new-page-1.12665>
- Werner, Reinhard: *The focus on bibliometrics makes papers less useful* - In: *Nature* – Vol. 517 (2015) 7534: p. 245. – URL: <http://www.nature.com/news/the-focus-on-bibliometrics-makes-papers-less-useful-1.16706>
- Wikipedia: *Hijacked Journal* – URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijacked_journal
- Beall, Jeffrey: *Predatory journals: Ban predators from the scientific record*. – In: *Nature* 534 (2016) 326 <https://www.nature.com/articles/534326a>
- OASPA: Membership Criteria: <https://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria/>
- OASPA: Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing/>

Questions or experiences? Please don't hesitate to contact us (Bibliothek@...).

Also, when you're unsure regarding a journal's quality: we are looking forward to assist you & we love to get your experiences: via sharing them with us also other scientists can benefit!