

Clues to quality of journals

Publishing in scientific journals of high quality is **important** in order to **meet professional goals** (e.g. tenure review, grant funding) and to **reach the intended audience**.

Fake/ predatory/ fraudulent journals reinforce APCs but **publish without Peer Review or Publishing Services** (e.i. quality control, licensing, indexing into indexing services/databases, content preservation).

What is the harm and how does it affect you? Good science may get lost or interpreted as poor science when published in predatory journals. Thus, before publishing, please check the quality criteria of your journal.

So, how to avoid publishing in a journal with low quality or fake journal? Please be aware that assessing a single or only a few criteria is insufficient for determining whether a journal is predatory, see also Olivarez et al. 2018

- 1. Ask for Advice regarding experiences with journal/ publisher:** ask experts ([contact us](#)) and/or research colleagues or ask via research network (dubious: misleading infos, mimic others, website has different URLs, dead links, spam* invitation mails, poor grammar no/ fake contact/physical location: address displayed & correct? see [12](#))
- 2. Journal's name unique** (not similar to a well-known one) **congruent with mission & geographical** ("Swiss", "European" → congruent with editors/papers?) **or topical relationship** (content resp. origin should meet the journal's name)
- 3. Check the Impact:** use following tools for getting an impression of the impact
 - 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
= Impact Factor
Number of citable articles published in previous two years

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

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

**** No matching journals were found. ****

1) Search by:	2) Type search term:
ISSN	Enter words from journal title or ISSN (view list of full journal titles) 0975-9158
	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) [SClago 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. [t](#))

- 4. Scope & audience** (e.g. researchers): must be well-defined, either transdisciplinary scope (Nature, Science..., not too broad & not combining fields that don't belong to each other) or specified scope (corresponding with 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 be careful & observe it **very critically**. *We suggest asking colleagues like us (see [1](#)), who are familiar with these issues for several years
- 8. Publication history:** long-established = bigger outreach, **periodicity:** consistently/ regularly published? Avoid journals with 'light content'/pseudo-science content & avoid those with many name/URL changes or claim to be the "leading" one
- 9. Archive of past issues:** displayed? unusual small/ large/ variable numbers of articles? Issues/articles complete/missing?
- 10. Open or closed** (=behind paywalls) **access:** access ways stated? see [f](#)) dubious: copyproof locked PDF (=complicating plagiarism checks), crawling via search engines not allowed, see [h](#)) 75% not found & [n](#)) openly accessible for extra fee? = HybridOA (/OpenChoice) → HybridOA 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/ROME0](#))

- 12. Check the Publisher e.g. via Sherpa/ROME0:** Publisher/Journal does not hide who they are? Is Publisher well-known (not only claimed? see [q](#)) & 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 [q](#)) What else does it promote (non-academic, blinking ads?) /produce? Contact is journal/publisher-affiliated (no @gmx etc., no contact form? see [q](#)) and physical address displayed & correct? (check via [GoogleMaps via satellite](#) (predatory publishers use a virtual office or proxy business as physical address, see [q](#)) & check via [wholsIP](#))
 - Editorial Board incl. roles & affiliations:** displayed & true? Is editorial board made up? made-up names/ positions/ without persons' knowledge/permission? Editorial Board has sufficient members (more than 7members) Geographical diversity (esp. with international claim)? Are they well-known in your research area (do they

PUBLISHER

- work in your academic field & 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 [q](#))
- **Transparency in Publishing operations:** Publishing operations & manuscript handling must be well-described =high ethical/ professional standards see [x](#): a) **submission process**, b) **Peer review**, c) **author fees**, d) **guidelines for authors** (authorship, conflicts) / **reviewers**, e) **digital preservation** (CLOCKSS; PMC..), if no: [papers disappear](#), g) **contract & copyright policy** poorly written/no: predatory, see [q](#)), ©-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 (follow COPE*) against misconduct/ fraud:** retraction policy/ reporting guideline? (plagiarism-screening-tools, sufficient strategies against citation manipulation, data fabrication etc.) if insufficient→ 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 [h](#)): clearly stated fees or charges (e.g. pages, colored images) & can be easily found (median fees see [n](#)) predatory journal: \$100, OA-journal: \$1866, subscription-based: \$300), [dubious: APC-payment before submission, options for prepaying APCs for future articles](#)), too focused on the payment of fees? In case of OA Journal: Many OA-journals use an "author pays"-procedure/ GoldOA (see [k](#)), 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 [w](#) & [x](#))
 - **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 few journals ([dubious: large fleet from the beginning, template to quickly create each journal's home page see \[n\]\(#\)](#))
 - **No spam mails:** asking for peer-review, submitting papers (done also by good ones!) or suggesting reviewers see [b](#) → send spam mails to your IT-department for adding them to their blacklist of blocked senders/IPs/URLs
 - **Content indexed in legitimate indexing services (Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, JCR):**→ fosters disseminating content, claims correct? → check it: search articles ([falsely mentioned indices to rise submissions? see \[q\]\(#\)](#))

ARTICLES

13. **Check the quality of published articles** by evaluating various aspects (e.g. author, purpose...) - for details see [i](#)) guide [Check the relevance of information sources](#)
 - **Articles meeting disciplinary standards:** within scope, see [4](#) & meeting discipline's standards? → Read some, see [8](#) & [i](#)) Harzing, p.13f, Publ. date & article's pages/ID stated? (if not: [dubious](#)) see [f](#)) [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 "information for authors" on journal/publisher homepage)? → 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/less known & also accepts 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 [r](#)) **Review quality & duration?** should be conducted by at least 2 reviewers=experts in specific topic, [dubious: reviewers suggested by author see \[h\]\(#\)](#)) review 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? ([dubious: articles can't be found in GScholar](#)), see [f](#)) Published in print/ digital only? (print 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 readers 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 (Endnote, Mendeley...) to get the paper in the same style 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 favored article type higher-rated/ 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?

- a. **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
- b. **Linking to other output possible (e.g. data repository...)?** If so, readers are able to view the full set of research output
- c. **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 ones 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/>
- WAME: <http://wame.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing>
- COPE*: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing>
- 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:

- a) Beall's List: *Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers* – URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20161122185726/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>
- b) Burggren, Warren: *Marketing via E-mail Solicitation by Predatory (and Legitimate) Journals: an evaluation of Quality, Frequency, and Relevance.* – In: *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 6 (2018) eP2246. – URL: <https://jisc-pub.org/articles/abstract/10.7710/2162-3309.2246/>
- c) 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>
- d) 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>
- e) 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>
- f) DOAJ: Information for publishers <https://www.doaj.org/publishers>
- g) 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/>
- h) 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>
- i) Harzing, Anne-Wil; Adler, Nancy: *Disseminating knowledge: from potential to reality- new open-access journals collide with convention.* – In: *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 15(2016), 1 – In: <https://harzing.com/download/predatory.pdf>
- j) 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>
- k) HZI Criteria for financing articles via Publication Fund at page "Open Access". <https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliothek-open.de/zeitschriften/openaccess.aspx>
- l) HZI Library: *Hijacked Journals and Predatory Publishers.* <http://intranet-hzi/W/BIB/News%20Bibliothek/Hijacked%20Journals%20and%20Predatory%20Publishers.doc>
- m) 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>
- n) 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>
- o) Olivarez, Joseph D. et al: *Format Aside: Applying Beall's Criteria to Assess the Predatory Nature of both OA and Non-OA Library and Information Science Journals.* *College & Research Libraries* 79 (2018), 1 – URL: <https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/16614/18461>
- p) Shamseer, Larissa et al.: *Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison* – In: *BMC Medicine* (2017) <http://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9>
- q) Siler, Kyle: *Demarcating Legitimate and Predatory Academic Publishing: The Influence of Status on Institutional Logic Conflicts.* *SocArXiv*. June 30, 2019. – URL: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/6r274/>
- r) 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
- s) *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>
- t) 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>
- u) Wikipedia: Hijacked Journal – URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijacked_journal
- v) Beall, Jeffrey: *Predatory journals: Ban predators from the scientific record.* – In: *Nature* 534 (2016) 326 <https://www.nature.com/articles/534326a>
- w) OASPA: Membership Criteria: <https://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria/>
- x) OASPA: Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing/>, COPE*: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-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!