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 (tips for dubious ones: poor grammar, dead links, no or fake contact/ physical location, physical address displayed & correct?)

2. **Journal’s name congruent with mission & geographical** (e.g. “Swiss”, “European …”) or topical relationship (content resp. origin should meet the journal’s name) or 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/ JCR

   ![Impact Factor Calculation](image)

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

   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/suporthub/scopus/](https://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/14181/suporthub/scopus/))

   c) SCImago Journal & Country Rank.
   Please keep in mind that not all journals are listed due to discipline, 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.) or

   e) Google Scholar Metrics may also be helpful (for authors’ impact GS 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 k) Werner (2015)

4. **Scope & audience:** should be well-defined, scope is either transdisciplinary (e.g. Nature, Science) or specified (corresponding with the articles’ content?), geographical scope mentioned?, primary audience named?

5. **Size:** 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 rather dubious value – or other misleading metrics): ISSN/ JIF even existing and/or correct? check via JCR or Sherpa/ROMEO

7. **Check the directories ZDB / EZB / DOAJ:** a) journal referenced in the journals’ database/ Zeitschriftendatenbank 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

9. **Archive of past issues:** displayed? Issues/ articles complete or some missing?

10. **Open or closed** (behind paywalls) access: open for an extra fee? as-so-called hybrid OA (e.g. named as OpenChoice) 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): Gold: how much & can costs be covered? Green: deposit in repository with embargo or instantly?

12. **Check the Publisher e.g. via Sherpa/ROMEO:** Is Publisher well-known & run by important scholarly body (=prestigious journals)/ commercially-run? Are duplicated editorial boards in different journals? What else does it promote/ produce? Is the Contact journal-affiliated (no @gmx etc.) and physical address displayed & correct?

   - Editorial Board incl. roles/responsibilities: displayed? concocted editorial boards with made-up names/ without persons’ knowledge/ permission? Are those in the Editorial Board well-known in your research area (do they work in your academic field + associated with strong academic
programs/ research institutions)? Are they still actively-publishing important cited papers? (One of the quality metrics for scholars is the h-index, see this Scopus blogpost)

- **Transparency in Publishing operations:** Publishing operations should be well-described with thorough information (if not, it might indicate a predatory publisher) e.g. submission process, Peer review, author fees, guidelines for authors/ reviewers, policies or practices for digital preservation etc.

- **Correction/ retraction history:** correction rate compared to similar journals? Retracted articles existing and what are the retraction reasons? → frequent corrections/errata might indicate not very thorough editorial practices, retractions might indicate ineffective strategies against fraud or malpractice

- **Sufficient resources/ strategies against misconduct/ fraud:** if insufficient, the journal(s) suffer from repeated cases of plagiarism, self-plagiarism, image manipulation etc.

- **Publication Fees:** fees or charges (e.g. pages, colored images) easily found and clearly stated? (median fees, see j): predatory journal: $100, OA journal: $1866, subscription-based: $300), dubious: APC-payment before submission, options for prepaying APCs of future articles), not too focused on the payment of fees?

In case of OA Journal: Many OA journals use an "author pays" procedure/ Gold OA (see g) 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 o) & p)

- **Publisher’s operations:** publisher-for-profit or non-profit? (falsely claimed, relationships with other for-profit companies hided or obscured?). Publisher began operation with only a few journals (no large fleet, no template to quickly create each journal’s home page)

- **No spam requests:** for peer-review or submitting papers or for suggesting reviewers

- **Content indexed in legitimate abstracting and indexing services (Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, JCR...):** claims correct? → check claims & resources (resources might be falsely mentioned)

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**ARTICLES**

13. **Check the quality of published articles** by evaluating various aspects (e.g. author, purpose…) - for details see f) guide Check the relevance of information sources

- **Articles meeting disciplinary standards:** Are the articles within scope and meet the standards of our discipline?

- **DOI:** Articles have DOI’s (Digital Object Identifier) for accessing the articles permanently e.g. https://doi.org/10.1000/182

- **Rights for (Re-) Use & Copyright** clearly stated? Well-written? In case of an OA Journal: articles published with CreativeCommons-licence CC-BY (Attribution)? Dubious: complete OA stated but not all articles OA → journal publishes not according to its stated copyright

- **Do you usually read the journal?** If not, it's probably better to publish in a journal which you and your colleagues do read.

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**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 & Guidelines for authors/ reviewers:** single/double-/triple-blind or open-peer review? Post-publication peer review? Details should be available in editorial policies, instructions to authors, or "about this journal" sections

16. **Time from submission to decision:** appropriate time (dubious: promotion of rapid publishing)

17. **Time from submission to publication online:** appropriate time, e.g. some months to 1 year (dubious: promotion of rapid publishing) → indicates well-organized production process

18. **ePublication approach:** "continuous online" publication (⇒reaches potential audiences faster but journal should alert potential readers to online-only articles) or are articles arranged into issues or digital only? →"continuous online" is better (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 a printed issue)

19. **Time from ePublication to Printed issue:** appropriate time, desirable journals have longer timings due to many excellent articles (some have 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 length limit:** what is the maximum length? (length can vary: research notes(2000+words) to full article) Different kinds of articles offered? (Is the favored one 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 similar territory but not so much so that it 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?** If so, readers are able to view the full set of research output
- **Download data offered?** Download data is useful: ongoing high scores indicate a strong and engaged online readership

Those and additional criteria are also summed up by
- Beall, Jeffrey: [Even more criteria](https://www.bealllist.com/)
- Cabells: [Blacklist](https://www.cabells.com/blacklist-criteria/)
- Washington University's Hizi Library: [checklist](http://libguides.wustl.edu/c.php?g=47124&p=302704)

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 publisher/journal.

This checklist’s design is based on Crawford’s aspects in article: *Journals, “Journals” and Wannabes: Investigating the List* [https://citesandinsights.info/civ14i7.pdf](https://citesandinsights.info/civ14i7.pdf)

Further information:

e) 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](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk)
f) HZI Library: Check the relevance of information sources – HZI Library – URL: [https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliotheca-open.de/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rYFe8nEOB04%3d&tabid=81&mid=625&language=de-DE](https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliotheca-open.de/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rYFe8nEOB04%3d&tabid=81&mid=625&language=de-DE)
g) HZI Criteria for financing articles via Publication Fund (planned), in general at page “Open Access”, [https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliotheca-open.de/zeitsschriften/openaccess.aspx](https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliotheca-open.de/zeitsschriften/openaccess.aspx)
n) Beall, Jeffrey: Predatory journals: Ban predators from the scientific record. – In: Nature 534 (2016) 326 [https://www.nature.com/articles/534326a](https://www.nature.com/articles/534326a)
o) OASPA: Membership Criteria: [https://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria/](https://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria/)

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