

# 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, 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 met 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](#)



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

| 1) Search by: | 2) Type search term:                                                                                     |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ISSN          | Enter words from journal title or ISSN ( <a href="#">view list of full journal titles</a> )<br>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](#))

Quality criteria: JOURNAL

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

c) [SCIago 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? =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?

PUBLISHER

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

## PUBLISHER

- 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 hidden 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)

## 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 [Creative Commons](#)-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.

## 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 & 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: <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>

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>

#### 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>
- 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/>
- HZI Library: *Check the relevance of information sources* – HZI Library – URL: <https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliothek.de/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YvFe8nEOB04%3d&tabid=81&portalid=1&mid=625&language=de-DE>
- HZI Criteria for financing articles via Publication Fund (planned), in general at page "Open Access": <https://helmholtz-hzi.bibliothek.de/zeitschriften/openaccess.aspx>
- HZI Library: *Hijacked Journals and Predatory Publishers*. <http://intranet-hzi/WW/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>
- 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>
- 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](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/>

In case of questions please don't hesitate to contact us (library@helmholtz-muenchen.de). Also, when you're unsure regarding a journal's quality: we are looking forward to assist you.