

# Journal checklist

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There are numerous considerations and tools that can guide researchers in assessing the quality of scholarly journals. The following aspects and related due diligence assessment questions can guide the researcher in making informed decisions on a journal's quality and standing.

## *Journal reputation and standing*

- Are you able to find the journal title easily using a web-browser and search engine?
- Is it easy to find the latest issue and articles published in the journal?
- Does the journal have a long-standing reputation and has the journal been publishing regularly over a period of time?
- Does the journal provide information about its previous name changes, if applicable?
- Does the journal claim a valid and verifiable impact factor?
- Does the journal use internationally accepted metrics?
- Does the journal have an ISSN and/or e-ISSN?
- Do articles in the journal have Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs)?

## *Journal affiliation*

- Is the journal published by, associated with or affiliated to a reputable organisation (e.g., academic societies)?
- Is the journal endorsed by a reputable organisation?
- Is the journal or journal publisher a member of the Committee on Publication and Ethics (COPE), Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), European Association of Science Publishers (EASE) and/or listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)?

## *Peer review policy & processes*

Peer reviewing of research is viewed as the foundation of quality assessment and scientific rigour within the scholarly communications environment. Journals that do not require peer reviewing or that falsely claim to do peer reviewing need to be avoided by scholarly authors.

- Does the journal require a peer review as part of the publication process?
- Has the journal got a clear and well-defined peer review policy?
- Is the peer review process informative and apparent?
- What type of peer-review process is followed? Does the journal follow a double-blind peer review process?
- How many reviewers are typically used during peer review?
- How long does the peer review process typically take? Is this timeline reasonable given disciplinary or industry standards?
- What is the journal's acceptance rate? (Journals with lower article acceptance rates are typically regarded as more prestigious.)

## *Editorial boards*

- Does the journal have an editorial board, and are the members of the board clearly stated?
- Do the editors belong to editorial forums e.g., World Association of Medical Editors (WAME)?
- Do the editors state on their websites or professional social networking platforms that they are the editors of the journal in question? (Editorial boards may be highjacked.)
- Are the editors associated with reputable organisations locally or internationally?
- Are the editors experts in their respective disciplines?

## *Publication processes*

- Are the publication timelines realistic and indicative of rigorous peer review?
- Is the journal associated with a reputable publisher?
- What business model (e.g. Open, Hybrid or Closed access) does the journal follow? If it is an Open Access journal:
  - Is the Open Access (OA) model clearly stated?
  - Does it charge Article Processing Charges (APCs)? If it charges APCs, are they realistic?
  - Does the publisher consider waivers or discounts on the APCs? (This practice is helpful for researchers from emerging economies.)
  - Is there a withdrawal or admin fee if authors wish to retract their submissions? (When a journal requests a fee to retract a paper, it may be indicative of questionable practices.)
  - If a withdrawal or admin fee for retractions exists, are there any conditions applied by the publisher? Do you retain copyright when you retract a paper?
- Does the author retain copyright during the submission process? (Preferably an author should retain copyright.)
- Does the author retain copyright of the work once published? (Generally, if the journal is open access, authors retain their copyright.)
- Does the author have to sign a publisher's agreement?

## *Indexing and abstracting*

- Is the journal indexed in one of the major indices, e.g., Elsevier's SCOPUS or Clarivate's Web of Science?
- Is the journal indexed and abstracted by an established and reputable bibliographic indexing service, e.g., Philosopher's Index?

## *Administrative and technical transparency*

- Is there a clear policy statement on their website regarding ethics, peer review, etc.?
- Are permanent identifiers used and registered with established identifier services, e.g., CrossRef?
- Is there an indication of archiving processes, e.g., LOCKSS?
- Are there clear indications of transparency and best practice?

## *Website and correspondence*

- Is the journal website professional in terms of look and feel?
- Does the website contain advertisements or other media that are not directly related to the journal or publisher?
- Does the website indicate the physical address of the publisher? Are clear contact details provided?

- ☑ Are there spelling or grammatical errors or other questionable characteristics on the journal website or in correspondence received? (Websites and correspondence should not have spelling or grammatical errors or other questionable characteristics.)
- ☑ Are invitations to publish addressed to authors by name or by using vague greetings? (Vague greetings may be indicative of questionable practices or mass spam.)
- ☑ Are invitations to authors very informal or over-flattering? Are invitations to authors entirely unrelated to their discipline or field of expertise? (Over-flattering invitations or invitations unrelated to the authors' expertise may be indicative of questionable practices.)

*It should be noted that no process is infallible. Additional measures might include speaking to colleagues, librarians or experts in the field regarding their experiences with certain journals or publishing houses. Also ensure that individual articles have not been retracted (see Retraction Watch: <https://retractionwatch.com/>).*

### *Useful checklists, tools and resources*

- Think. Check. Submit. (<https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>)
- Cabell's International (<https://www2.cabells.com/about-predatory>)
- Beall's List (<https://beallslist.net/>)
- DOAJ Delisted Titles ([https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/183mRBRqs2jOyP0qZWXN8dUd02D4vL0Mov\\_kgY\\_F8HORM/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/183mRBRqs2jOyP0qZWXN8dUd02D4vL0Mov_kgY_F8HORM/edit#gid=0))
- Retraction Watch (<https://retractionwatch.com/>)
- Flaky Academic Journals (<http://flakyj.blogspot.com/>)
- Scholarly Horizons (<https://scholarlyhorizons.co.za/resources/predatory-publishing-practices-and-citation-pollution/>)
- Scholarly Publishing Stings ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_scholarly\\_publishing\\_stings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_scholarly_publishing_stings) AND <https://www.k12academics.com/Education%20Scandals%20and%20Controversies/Academic%20Scandals/list-scholarly-publishing-stings>)
- Quackwatch (<https://quackwatch.org/>)
- Predatory Publishing (<https://predatory-publishing.com/>)
- Predatory Journals – A one stop shop for resources (<https://ohri.ca/journalology/one-stop-shop-predatory-journals>)
- Journal Checker Tool (<https://journalcheckertool.org/>)
- The IAP report on 'Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences' (<https://www.interacademies.org/project/predatorypublishing>)