Predatory Publishing

# Publishing basics

While there may be changes from journal to journal, generally the process will involve the following steps:

1. As an author, you send your work to a journal through their stated submission channels.
2. The journal sends your work needs to an editor, who reviews your work to see if it fits the scope of the journal.
3. The editor can then pass your work along to peer reviewers, who review your work for quality and rigor.
4. This process can repeat, with the peer reviewers sending the work back to you for revisions, which then need to go back to the editor, and maybe around again.

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| Peer review types | Definition |
| Single blind | Reviewers know who you are, but you don’t know who the reviewers are. |
| Double blind | Neither group knows who the other is. |
| Open | Both groups know each other. |

This process is generally lengthy, and can involve multiple stages of communication and revision before a final draft is accepted. Journals that promise guaranteed acceptance or rapid review times are not quality journals and should be avoided.

Open access journals

Open access journals are those journals where articles published in the journal are made freely available to anyone with access to the internet on publication. Many of these have a “pay-to-publish” model that relies on article processing charges (APCs) paid by the author of the article.

## Predatory publishing

Predatory publishers are those that take advantage of the pay-to-publish model, lying to you about applying the same rigorous standards as reputable publications. These publications do not provide peer or editorial review generally, are generally not indexed (and therefore findable by other researchers), and may not remain on the web for very long (some predatory publications only last on web for a few months or a few years). Both journals and conferences can engage in these kinds of predatory practices.

“Deceptive publishers (also commonly referred to as “predatory journals”) are for-profit entities that purport to publish high quality academic research, but who do not follow accepted scholarly publishing best practices. Their ultimate goal is to make money, not publish quality research. Being associated with a deceptive publisher can lead to financial loss as a result of inappropriate fees, or be harmful to your reputation and that of your institution, even possibly impeding promotion and tenure.”

University of Toronto Libraries

# Characteristics of a quality journal

Quality journals can be identified using three key questions:

## Is your content appropriate for the journal?

The aims and scope of the journal should be clearly listed, and they should generally be fairly subject-specific, with a relatively narrow focus. A quality journal will give you the tools to easily determine whether your work is a good fit with the type of scholarship they are looking for.

### **Your job**

Evaluate the stated scope of the journal against the content of your article. Take a look through the journal content, and compare it to the kind and quality of work that you have read elsewhere or written yourself.

### Example exercise:

Search in Scopus to find journals that might be of interest. Use the terms “copyright AND (“scholarly publishing OR “academic publishing”).”

Read the aims and scope of a journal you are interested in. For example, if I wanted to publish in [the Journal of Scholarly Publishing](https://utpjournals.press/journals/jsp/scope). My article is on copyright and funding changes for academic scholarship, and so I can see where it would fit in their aims and scope. I can also look at their call for papers – it says they accept research articles and opinion essays – so my research paper would fit.

## Will others be able to find your work?

The journal should list where the content will be indexed. The more the content is indexed (assuming it is in the right spots) the better the chance your work has to be found and read. Quality journals will be indexed in reputable databases within your field, such as [Scopus](https://www-scopus-com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/search/form.uri?display=basic#basic), [Web of Science](https://www-webofscience-com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/wos/woscc/basic-search), and [Ulrichs](http://ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/). You can browse a list of different databases in the Library’s [research guide](https://subjectguides.uwaterloo.ca/az.php?a=s).

### **Your job**

Think about where you and your colleagues find research materials. Make sure the journal you publish in is indexed in those places. If you cannot easily find papers from this journal, chances are that others won’t easily find yours either. You can use [Ulrich’s Global Serials Directory](http://ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/) to help discover whether something is indexed appropriately.

Ulrichs provides lots of information about serials that are published worldwide. It contains academic publications, trade publications, and content like newspapers and magazines. Ulrichs will tell you if a publication is peer reviewed, who the publisher is, how long the journal has been active, if the journal has any previous names, and where the journal is indexed. In the journal record, find the “Abstracting & Indexing” section, and it will reveal the different databases in which the title is indexed.

## How is content selected? How is it reviewed?

The journal’s peer review process should be clearly listed, explicitly outlining how the review is going to be conducted, and by whom. At minimum, the journal should specify which kind of review will be taking place, so that you know how to blind your manuscript. For reputable journals, this process should typically be either:

* Single blind review – Where the authors don’t know the reviewers but the reviewers are aware of whose work they are looking at.
* Double blind review – Where the authors don’t know who is reviewing their work, and identifying information is stripped from the document(s) so that the reviewers don’t know who the author of the work is.

There should never be a guarantee of acceptance, and most of the time a guarantee of short peer review times is a red flag. You want to think about the amount of work that goes into the process and who is doing that work. Editors of journals are usually people with full time jobs as professors/researchers who are doing this work as part of their jobs. For a proper review, a journal also needs to find two people who are experienced enough in the area of your work that they can provide a quality peer review of it. This all takes time, so a guarantee of short review times generally means that the review isn’t happening.

**Your job:** Review the editorial board. The journal should have the members of their editorial board listed, and you should ensure that these editors have the required expertise and credentials to evaluate the work within the journal’s scope. If you are unsure of the names or credentials do some searching to double check. Similarly, review the journal’s peer review process. If you can’t find it or don’t understand it initiate further review of the journal’s practices.

### Example exercise:

Review [Editage Guide to the publication process](https://www.editage.com/insights/a-look-at-the-conventional-journal-publishing-workflow).

Based on the workflow discussed in the above link, it is clear that editors need some expertise in the subject area to determine whether the article is appropriate for the journal, and whether it’s worth the time and energy to go through the process of peer review. This is why there should be information for the editorial board of a journal, and why you should at least do a cursory check to see if those people have the credentials and expertise that you would expect for a journal in that area.

## Additional factors: Important things to keep in mind

Very few factors can stand on their own. Use the factors collectively to help you make a decision, rather than ruling a journal out based on one factor. By combining all the different elements of review, you can accurately assess whether a journal is predatory.

Journals generally exist on a quality spectrum. not all reputable journals are high quality, and not all poor quality journals are necessarily predatory. Think about what you need at this stage in your research and in your career, and choose a quality journal that meets your needs.

In addition, you can consider the following factors to help you identify a journal’s overall quality. These additional factors aren’t as important as the three main questions listed above, but can be used in combination with the others to help you make a decision. In comparison to our top three, these factors are less likely to make or break your decision to publish in a particular journal.

* **Journal history:** Is the journal new or well established?
* **Affiliations**: Is the journal associated with a scholarly society, trade association, or University?
* **Membership in publishing organizations**: Is the publisher a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), or for Open Access journals a member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)?
* **Website content:** Is a suitable degree ofcare evident? High professional standards should be in place. Aims & Scope should be included, and ISSNs should be displayed.
* **Copyright:** Is the journal’s policy on copyright clear? Consider your responsibilities regarding your thesis, and the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy.
* **Review speed:** Does the stated review speed seem realistic?A promise of a fast turnaround (relative to other journals in the field) can often be a red flag.
* **Acceptance rates:** These can provide a clue as to the perceived prestige and demand compared to the availability. A very high acceptance can sometimes be a red flag.
* **Journal rankings:** Consider CiteScore and Impact Factor, which indicate the average number of times that articles from a journal have been published in the past two or three years.
  + Context is important to use journal rankings, as citation practices vary by discipline, and impact factors vary accordingly. Journal rankings should not be used to compare journals from different disciplines. This is just one factor to evaluate a journal, and should never be used alone.

## Red flags

If you lack the time or confidence to review journals in more depth, here are some quick red flags that you can watch for.

* You are sent a spam-like email asking for a submission
* The journal is not indexed where it claims to be
* The journal lists an impact factor or CiteScore that is not verifiable
* Publication is guaranteed
* Journal name is misleading
* Publication charges are unclear, or required before acceptance

While none of these on their own necessarily mean a journal is predatory, they are a good indicator that you might want to avoid these journals, or at least that they warrant a much closer look.

## Example: Building and Environment

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| Factor | Notes | Source |
| Aims and scope | Clearly outlined, “*Building and Environment* is an international journal that publishes original research papers and review articles related to building science, urban physics, and human interaction with the indoor and outdoor built environment.”... | https://www.journals.elsevier.com/building-and-environment |
| Indexing | Indexed in Scopus and Web of Science | E |
| Content selection and review | Peer review is single blind; sent to two reviewers.  Editor-in-chief is a professor of mechanical engineering at Purdue, whose current research interests are sustainable building design and analysis. He identifies being Editor-in-Chief on his personal website. | https://www.elsevier.com/journals/building-and-environment/0360-1323/guide-for-authors |
| History | Published since 1965 | Ulrichs |
| Affiliations | None |  |
| Memberships | Editor-in-Chief is a member of COPE.  Elsevier is also a member of COPE. | https://publicationethics.org/members/ |
| Acceptance rate | 20.3% in 2017 (484 of 2282 submissions) | https://journalinsights.elsevier.com/journals/0360-1323/acceptance\_rate |
| Website | ISSN is displayed and accurate.  Website well-organized. | https://journalinsights.elsevier.com/journals/0360-1323/acceptance\_rate |
| Copyright | Copyright policy in place and clearly stated. Policy in place for sharing accepted manuscripts - an embargo of 24 months applies which does not meet Tri-Agency Open Access Policy requirements. | https://www.elsevier.com/journals/building-and-environment/0360-1323/guide-for-authors |
| Review speed | An average of 2.7 weeks to first decision, and 4.2 weeks to final decision. | https://journalinsights.elsevier.com/journals/0360-1323/review\_speed |
| Journal ranking | Impact factor: 4.82, ranked 3rd of 132 journal in the Civil Engineering category in Web of Science; CiteScore: 5.6, ranked 7th of 287 in Civil and Structural Engineering in Scopus | JCR/Scopus |

## Example: Open Journal of Civil Engineering

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| Factor | Notes | Source |
| Aims and scope | Aims and scope too broad | https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojce/ |
| Indexing | States that it’s indexed in Web of Science - it’s not; list of indexes includes SHERPA/RoMEO which is not an index, list of indexed sources does not match that on Ulrichs | Ulrichs; https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojce/ |
| Content selection and review | Board members are listed, but no information about the Editor-in-Chief is provided (a check of his profile at Wayne State reveals that he is an associate professor of Civil Engineering) . A quick check of the board members reveals that at least three do not list this journal on their public profile pages.  Peer review is single blind. | https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojce/ |
| History | Published since 2011. | Ulrichs |
| Affiliations | None |  |
| Memberships | Editor-in-Chief is a not listed as a member of COPE.  Scientific Research is also a not a member of COPE, or OASPA.  The journal is not indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. | <https://publicationethics.org/members/>  DOAJ  <https://oaspa.org/membership/members/> |
| Acceptance rate | Not listed |  |
| Website | ISSN is displayed and accurate.  Website in good condition, but there are some oddities, such as contact information, which is dodgy. | ISSN portal |
| Copyright | Copyright policy in place and clearly stated. Authors retain copyright. | https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojce/ |
| Review speed | Decision letters are sent within 4 weeks. | https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojce/ |
| Journal ranking | Not indexed by Scopus or Web of Science; does not have a ranking. | JCR/Scopus |