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Effective Search Strategies for Article Publication: A Comprehensive Guide to Choosing the Right Journal

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ABSTRACT

Publication is the lifeblood of research, it allows for knowledge to be shared, scrutinized and built upon, fostering the advancement of human understanding. Knowledge that is not published holds little value as it cannot contribute to the broader scientific community or drive progress. Academics often face constant pressure to publish to advance in their careers, gain professional recognition, access scholarships and grants, and remain competitive. For novice researchers, selecting the right journal for publication is one of the most crucial decisions. This article provides a guide for researchers, highlighting the essential factors to consider when choosing a journal for their work.

Keywords: Publication, Search strategy, Selecting journal.

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INTRODUCTION

Selecting the right journal for your research is one of the most critical yet often overlooked steps in the publication process. Submitting your paper to an unsuitable journal can lead to multiple rejections, delaying your progress and career development. It's essential to evaluate your work realistically.[1] Both inexperienced and experienced researchers sometimes make the mistake of targeting the wrong journal. Even high-quality research may be rejected if its topic does not match the scope of the journal. This error can be costly in terms of time, money, and motivation.[2]

Ideally, researchers should decide on their target journal before beginning to write the manuscript. This is crucial because journals often have specific requirements, such as preferred article formats, word limits, and referencing styles (e.g., Harvard or Vancouver).[3] Additionally, different journals cater to distinct audiences. Planning not only makes the writing process more efficient but also increases the chances of acceptance by ensuring the manuscript aligns with the journal's guidelines.

Selecting a journal involves creating an initial list of potential options and then narrowing it down. To start this process, it's important to conduct some preliminary research to familiarize yourself with well-established journals in your field. You can explore resources such as library databases and Google Scholar. Additionally, many publishers offer journal suggestion tools, such as those from Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, JANE, and DOAJ. Another helpful strategy is to look for calls for papers, which may be posted by publishers or the journals themselves. Consulting with colleagues and supervisors is also valuable, as their experiences can help you avoid common pitfalls.

To narrow down the suggested shortlist, we will examine key factors such as the journal's aim and scope, metrics and citations, target audience, editorial board and peer review process, indexing status, open access policies, publication fees, acceptance rate, and time to publication. *(Table 1)*

Table 1: Key consideration while selecting a journal

1.	Aim and scope of the journal
2.	Target audience
3.	Journal author guidelines
4.	Journal metrics and citation
5.	Journal indexing
6.	Editorial board and peer review
7.	Article publication charges and open access
8.	Acceptance rate
9.	Publication time
10.	Journal restrictions

Aim and scope of a journal

The aim of a journal refers to its primary objective or purpose, while the scope outlines how the journal intends to achieve this goal. The aims and scope statement typically includes an introduction to the journal, a description of the topics it covers, the types of articles it publishes (and what it does not), its peer review policy, and details about open access (OA) options. Referring to the aims and scope in your cover letter demonstrates to the editor that you've carefully considered why your article is a good fit for the journal and how it aligns with its goals.[3,4]

Additionally, it is essential to evaluate the scientific quality of the journal by reviewing its most recent issues. High-quality journals typically publish original research, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), systematic reviews, and meta-analyses from authors worldwide. The journal's tables and figures should be clear, precise, and free of redundant data, with well-defined legends. References should adhere to the journal's style, being complete, relevant, reproducible, and up-to-date.[5]

Most reputable journals use plagiarism detection tools like iThenticate and may require authors to submit relevant reporting checklists. Authors are typically asked to declare any conflicts of interest, disclose financial and non-financial information, submit ethical approvals (for human or animal studies), register clinical trials, obtain informed consent, and follow research integrity guidelines, including those from ICMJE, the Committee on Publication Ethics, and the World Association of Medical Editors.[5]

Understanding metrics and citation

Metrics are tools used to count, assess, rank, and compare the research impact of journals, articles, authors, or organizations, based on the citations of their scholarly publications. These metrics are a core component of bibliometrics, which is the statistical analysis of publications like books and articles to evaluate research performance and impact. (Figure 1)

(Figure 2)

Figure 1: Types of Research Matrices

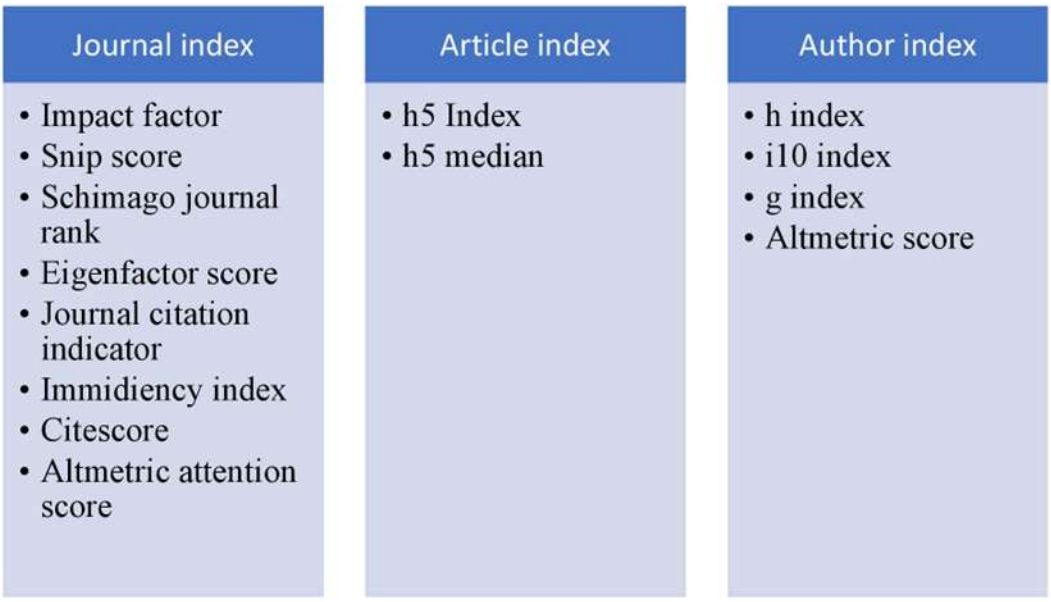

Figure 2: Type of indices

The impact factor (IF) is a metric used to assess the significance of a scientific journal based on how often its articles are cited in other research. It is calculated by dividing the number of citations in a given year for articles published in the previous two years by the total number of articles published in those two years. A higher impact factor generally reflects greater citation frequency, which is often associated with journals publishing influential or high-quality studies.[8] The impact factor is the most widely used metric for evaluating a journal. Citation patterns vary across different fields, which is reflected in the calculation of the journal's impact factor. Published annually through the Web of Science Journal Citation Reports, the impact factor is assigned to journals indexed in the Science Citation Index and Expanded® (SCIE).

The Journal Citation Index (JCI) is a resource that provides citation data for academic journals across various fields. It is a field-normalized measure of citation impact, where a value of 1.0 indicates that the published papers in a journal received a number of citations equal to the average citation count in that specific subject category. The global average is set at 1.0. Values above 1.0 suggest a higher-than-average citation impact (e.g., a value of 2.0 indicates twice the average), while values below 1.0 indicate a citation impact lower than the average.[9]

The Immediacy Index gauges how rapidly articles from a journal are cited within the same year of publication. It is calculated by dividing the number of citations received by the journal in a specific year by the total number of articles published in that year. [10]

The Source Normalized Impact Per Paper (SNIP) is released twice a year and assesses data over a three-year span. It adjusts for subject-specific variations, allowing for more accurate

comparisons of journals across different fields. SNIP evaluates the number of citations a journal receives in relation to the expected citations for its subject area.[11]

The CiteScore metric, available for journals indexed in Scopus, is designed to capture the ideal citation period for most subject areas. It calculates the ratio of citations received to the amount of research published, considering all content published in a journal (not only articles and reviews).[12]

The Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) metric is designed to assess a journal's impact by accounting for the subject area, quality, and reputation of the journal. Rather than treating all citations equally, it gives more weight to citations from higher-prestige journals. The SJR is calculated by dividing the total number of citations in Scopus to articles published in the previous three years by the total number of articles published in those years. [13]

The Eigen factor is a metric designed to evaluate a journal's academic influence over a five-year window. It is derived by dividing the weighted citations received in a particular year for articles published within the preceding five years by the total number of articles published during that timeframe. This approach provides a measure of how much impact a journal has had in the broader scholarly literature.[14]

The Altmetric Attention Score gauges the online visibility and engagement of a research publication. It tracks various forms of online mentions, each given a different weight depending on its significance. The score is determined by aggregating data from a variety of sources beyond citations and usage, such as social media discussions, news articles, blog posts, policy documents, patents, and online reference management tools. The value of each mention is adjusted based on its context and influence within the digital space.[15]

A citation is a reference to a published or unpublished source used to support research, acknowledge the work of others, or provide evidence for claims made in a scholarly work. It typically includes details such as the author's name, title of the work, publication date, and publisher or journal information. Citations serve to give credit to original ideas, ensure academic integrity, and allow readers to trace the sources of information used. [7]

How much should you rely on metrics?

Metrics can be influenced by the subject area. In fields with a smaller pool of researchers, journals may have lower Impact Factors. In these cases, it is often more advantageous to prioritize journals that reach the intended audience rather than focusing solely on Impact Factor. This issue is widely discussed within the scientific community, with some researchers advocating for selecting journals based on their relevance to the target readership rather than their Impact Factor. This approach increases the likelihood that your paper will be reviewed by experts in the field. Additionally, when your work is read by the right audience, it tends to

receive more citations. Many researchers question the value of Impact Factor, arguing that it does not adequately reflect the quality of individual research, and thus should not be the primary factor in evaluating scholarly work.[3]

Target audience

If your research appeals to a broad audience across various fields, a general journal covering a wide range of topics may be appropriate. However, if your topic is more specialized and geared toward a specific group of readers, a niche journal would be a better choice. For example, the Journal of Dental Research (JDR) is broader in scope compared to specialized journals like the Journal of Periodontology or the Journal of Endodontics. Some journals also publish in languages other than English, such as Korean, French, Chinese, Italian, and Russian, sometimes with or without English translations. Bilingual journals face challenges like the need for translation services, potential issues with data accuracy, and higher costs. To address this, some journals publish only abstracts in English or follow a sequential approach, where the original language version is released first, followed by the English version.[6]

Journal indexing

Journals indexed in major bibliographic and citation databases have a distinct advantage over those that are not. Indexing indicates that the journal has met the stringent scientific and editorial standards set by the indexing organization, which are difficult to achieve and maintain. Additionally, indexing enhances the visibility and accessibility of published articles, making it easier for researchers to find relevant literature in their field. However, indexing should not be considered the sole factor in deciding where to publish.[5]

Editorial board and peer review process

The quality of a journal is often reflected in its editor-in-chief and editorial board members, as they provide insight into the journal's credibility and reach. Some journals are the official publications of prestigious societies or associations, such as the *Journal of the Indian Association of Public Health Dentistry* and the *Journal of the Indian Prosthodontic Society.* High-quality journals typically feature renowned experts from around the world on their editorial boards, individuals with numerous publications and recognized authority in their fields. The contact details, affiliations, and academic qualifications of these editorial team members are usually provided. Any attempt by a journal to conceal such information should raise concerns. Articles that contain significant spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors, or appear disorganized, suggest inadequate editorial oversight and lack of proper review, which tarnish the journal's reputation.

A reliable journal will have a transparent, double-blind peer-review process. Peer review is essential for evaluating the validity, quality, and originality of articles, ensuring only credible

research is published and maintaining the integrity of science. From a publisher's standpoint, peer review serves as a filter, ensuring that high-quality articles are directed to reputable journals, thereby strengthening the brand of journal.[3]

The peer-review process varies across different publishing houses. For instance, Elsevier, a major academic publisher, follows a comprehensive process that typically involves a double-blind review, where both the reviewer and the author remain anonymous to each other. This approach minimizes bias and ensures that the review focuses solely on the quality and relevance of the research. The reviewers are selected based on their expertise in the relevant field, and they assess the manuscript for its scientific rigor, novelty, and contribution to the field. This careful review process not only maintains the integrity of the research but also ensures that only high-quality articles are published. For publishers, peer review serves as a vital filter, ensuring that only robust, well-vetted content makes its way to publication, thereby enhancing the journal's reputation and academic impact.[16]

Journal author guidelines

Journals typically provide explicit guidelines regarding authors' rights and copyright matters, which outline the permissions related to patenting, using, reusing, publishing, sharing, or modifying a work. These policies can usually be found on the journal's website. It is important to note that these terms may vary between open access (OA) and subscription-based journals. Therefore, it is recommended to familiarize yourself with these policies before submitting a manuscript to any journal.[5]

Open access and article publishing charges

Open Access (OA) publishing refers to the practice of making scholarly research outputs freely available to the public, without access restrictions or subscription fees. In traditional publishing models, journals and articles are typically behind paywalls, meaning that only those with institutional or personal subscriptions can access them. In contrast, Open Access removes these barriers, allowing anyone to access, read, and download research articles for free.

OA publishing aims to make research more accessible and equitable, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their financial resources, can benefit from the knowledge and discoveries made in various fields. It has become particularly important for researchers and practitioners in developing countries, who may not have access to expensive journal subscriptions. Furthermore, Open Access fosters collaboration and innovation by providing broader access to high-quality research, which can be referenced, shared, and built upon by others.

There are different types of Open Access:

- **Gold Open Access**: Articles are made freely available on the publisher's website immediately upon publication. In this model, authors or institutions often pay an Article Processing Charge (APC) to cover the costs of publication.
- **Green Open Access:** Authors deposit their manuscripts in institutional or subject-specific repositories, where they are freely accessible after an embargo period, often post-peer review.
- **Hybrid Open Access:** Some traditional subscription-based journals allow authors to pay an APC to make individual articles open access, while the rest of the journal remains behind a paywall.
- **Platinum Open Access :** A type of publication where articles are freely accessible to the public without requiring authors to pay article processing charges (APCs) or any publication fees. This model, sometimes called *diamond open access,* covers the costs of publication through other funding sources, such as institutional support, government grants, or philanthropic organizations, rather than charging the authors. This ensures that both the research and its readership can benefit from open access without financial barriers.

Unlike gold open access journals, which typically require authors to pay APCs, platinum open access journals maintain free access to content without imposing costs on the authors. This model is considered highly ethical, as it avoids potential biases that could arise from funding or publication fees, ensuring that the quality and integrity of research remain the focus. It also fosters greater inclusivity, allowing researchers from all financial backgrounds to contribute to the global body of scientific knowledge. In essence, platinum open access journals promote free access to research for readers and eliminate publication fees for authors, advancing a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable scientific community.

OA publishing has garnered widespread support from researchers, institutions, and funding agencies, who argue that public research should be freely accessible to the public who funded it. Open Access include the high costs of Article Processing Charges, which can be a burden for researchers without institutional funding. [17]

Sherpa Romeo is an invaluable online resource that helps researchers navigate the complexities of self-archiving their work while adhering to publisher policies. It provides a searchable database that summarizes copyright and self-archiving policies for a wide range of academic journals. By using Sherpa Romeo, researchers can determine the specific terms and conditions related to sharing their work, ensuring that they do not violate publisher agreements. Self-archiving, the practice of uploading an author’s work to an online repository (such as institutional or subject-specific archives), is a critical component of the Open Access

movement. It allows researchers to make their publications publicly accessible, increasing their visibility and impact, even if the journal itself is behind a paywall. Self-archiving not only promotes greater access to scholarly research but also ensures compliance with publisher policies, helping authors retain copyright while reaching a broader audience. Tools like Sherpa Romeo play a vital role in supporting researchers who wish to engage in self-archiving without infringing on the publishing agreements they have signed.[18]

Acceptance rate

The acceptance rate of a journal represents the proportion of submitted manuscripts that are approved for publication. It is calculated by dividing the number of accepted manuscripts by the total number of submissions. Journals with lower acceptance rates (e.g., below 5%) are often regarded as more prestigious due to their higher selectivity in publishing. In contrast, predatory journals typically have much higher acceptance rates, often around 80%, as they are less discerning about the manuscripts they accept. However, it is essential to recognize that acceptance rates alone do not provide a complete picture of a journal's quality or impact.[5]

Publication time

The speed at which a manuscript is published in reputable journals is crucial for disseminating scientific advancements and can impact the number of citations an article receives. Shorter publication times are often linked to higher-impact journals, making publication speed a potential indicator of journal quality. Studies show that journals with higher Impact Factor (IF) values tend to have faster submission-to-acceptance and in-print publication times, aligning with current editorial practices. However, publication time can vary widely depending on the journal and its internal processes, including the number of reviewers and their responsiveness. A publication time of under 30 days may suggest typographical errors, issues with the journal's paper-tracking system, or that the articles are not original research. On the other hand, a publication time exceeding 600 days could either be due to a clerical mistake or result from exceptional circumstances, where journal staff and reviewers likely had minimal involvement.[19]

Journal Archiving

Journal archiving refers to the practice of preserving and storing academic journals, along with their articles, in digital or physical repositories to ensure long-term access and preservation. Archiving allows future researchers, scholars, and the general public to access past issues of journals, ensuring the continuity of scholarly communication. It is a key aspect of maintaining the academic record, particularly as journals transition from print to digital formats. Open-access archiving, where journals or articles are freely available, has gained significant importance, with many institutions and organizations providing repositories to

preserve these works. Journal archiving helps prevent the loss of valuable research and supports the ongoing dissemination of knowledge.[20] The most commonly used platforms for journal archiving and self-archiving in the scientific community include PubMed Central (PMC), arXiv, SSRN (Social Science Research Network) , Zenodo and Institutional Repositories that plays a crucial role in ensuring open access to research and the long-term preservation of scholarly works, contributing to greater visibility and citation opportunities for the research community.

Predatory journals

In the haste to get published, young researchers often fall prey to deceptive journals that appear too lucrative, accommodative, and friendly. The ICMJE notes that an increasing number of organizations are presenting themselves as legitimate "scholarly medical journals" but fail to meet the standards of true academic journals. These "predatory" or "pseudo-journals" typically accept almost all submitted manuscripts and charge publication or article-processing fees, often informing authors of these charges only after the paper has been accepted. While they may claim to conduct peer review, they often do not, and they may deliberately use names that resemble those of reputable, established journals.[21]

Predatory journals exhibit several defining characteristics that differentiate them from legitimate academic publications. These journals often include a wide scope that spans both biomedical and non-biomedical topics, with websites that may contain noticeable spelling and grammatical errors. Images presented on the site can be distorted, misleading, or improperly attributed. Additionally, there is often a lack of transparency regarding the manuscript handling process, and submission procedures are frequently conducted via email. Such journals may promise rapid publication but fail to implement rigorous peer review or editorial processes. Their article processing charges are unusually low and they lack clear policies regarding content retraction or digital preservation. Furthermore, these journals may claim to offer open access but either retain copyright or fail to provide explicit copyright details. Contact information is often unprofessional, with email addresses linked to generic providers like Gmail or Yahoo. There is typically no well-defined policy on expert peer review and editing, and unsolicited emails from such journals may invite researchers to submit articles or join editorial boards. In some cases, these journals might also engage in direct solicitation for participation in international conferences. These patterns of behavior indicate that such journals prioritize profit over academic integrity, making them predatory in nature.[22]

CONCLUSION

As an emerging researcher, it is essential to have a fundamental understanding of the various

databases available for accessing relevant articles, the significance of journal metrics, and how publications influence the author's own metrics. Equally crucial is acquiring the technical expertise required to prepare a manuscript effectively. It is important for researchers to set realistic expectations regarding the quality of their work in relation to the journals they aim to submit to. High-impact journals, for instance, often have rejection rates exceeding 90-95%, with many submissions rejected during the initial editorial review. However, rejections should not discourage authors; instead, they should serve as motivation to refine and enhance the manuscript, ultimately improving its chances for success.

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