



Write a Scientific Paper (WASP): Which journal to target and why?



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ABSTRACT

Publishing scholarly work is a requisite in academia. Identifying a suitable journal for a particular paper can be difficult. Authors need to initially establish whether they want to publish in a subscription-based or an open access journal, which requires a clear understanding of the pros and cons of both options as well as issues relating to copyright licences. Establishing specific journal selection criteria ranging from whether to publish in a general or a specialised journal to the publication frequency of the journal is essential. A number of web-based tools are available that can facilitate this selection process.

1. Introduction

Scholars are primarily motivated to publish their work to share their knowledge and research findings with the scientific community, as well as to influence healthcare practice and/or policy. Regrettably, the academic and researcher community is under siege as a result of the “publish or perish” mantra. In fact, scholars are required to publish their work continuously throughout their career to maintain their professional status as well as to effectively compete for research grants and for career progression in academic institutions. Unfortunately, a number of barriers exist including the high volume of articles submitted to journals for consideration for publication and the significant rejection rates in prestigious journals. Therefore, understanding “the why and the how” in preparing an article and targeting a potential publishing journal is an art that needs to be acquired by all scholars [1].

2. Types of article

Journals may solicit submission of a paper/s by means of an invitation directed at an individual who is recognised as an expert in that particular area. Alternatively, researchers can opt to submit an article of general, specialist or local interest to a specific journal.

Invited papers are usually review articles, editorials or comments. Such invitations tend to originate from a journal's editor for a special issue on a particular topic. The editor invites an expert from the field in question to contribute a specific article. However, the academic world is now experiencing unsolicited invitations to researchers from an ever increasing number of journals under pressure to fill their next publication issue [2]. Such invitations should be carefully scrutinised, especially if the journal is not indexed in well-renowned databases such as PubMed and Web of Science and might originate from predatory or bogus journals.

In general however, the vast majority of scientific publications, especially original articles, are submitted by authors wishing to disseminate their research results and conclusions generally resulting in small incremental increases to current knowledge, or present data that refutes previously published data by other researchers in the field or

more rarely, report groundbreaking findings.

3. Types of journals

Journals can be subdivided into three categories: (1) subscription journals (2); electronic only journals (3); open access journals. The electronic only journals can be either subscription based or open access-based journals.

Subscription-based journals support free article submission, peer-review and publication of an article. However, the reader is required to subscribe to the journal or pay for single article/reprint access in order to acquire the full article. When publishing in a subscription-based journal, the author needs to transfer the copyright for the article to the journal which may limit the author's ability to re-use the published research although there are different copyright agreements and creative commons licences that differ in terms and conditions NB [3].

Open access journals require the author to pay an article processing fee (APC) once the article has been accepted for publication. The APC can range from a couple of hundred to thousands of euro. However, the author will gain immediate access to the full article once the article has been published with permission to disseminate their article via a link provided by the journal. This mode of publishing is expensive, and the author needs to weigh the pros and cons of such a publishing modality, which is only possible if the funds to cover the APC are available. Furthermore a number of open access journals/publishing houses are perceived as “vanity press” in that articles may be published without scientifically rigorous peer review. Such open access journals unfortunately cast a dark shadow on the field of open access publishing to the detriment of reputable open access publications. In addition, when opting for open access publishing, submitting authors need to be aware of predatory journals, some of which for example demand a sum of money as submission dues prior to even considering a submission.

3.1. Identifying a suitable journal

The plethora of journals covering general or highly specialised scientific themes/fields mandate appropriate selection of a journal

envisaged to reach the appropriate target readership for that research area. Matching the article's keywords to other published works in the area can aid in the identification of journals previously publishing such papers. Ultimately, the authors will still need to determine which journal to submit to by further applying selection criteria.

4. Web based tools

A number of web-based tools are available to aid authors to locate suitable and reliable journals. These tools are repositories that collect published articles from reputable journals in the form of a database. Scholars can access these published articles or their abstracts through customised search facilities including Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms, author names, title words, text words or phrases and journal names. By using such facilities, authors can identify potential journals that have already published similar articles in the field of study and are more likely to accept articles within the same genre. There are a number of web-based tools available including Google Scholar, SCOPUS, Medline, PubMed, Web of Science among others.

5. General vs. specialised journals

The authors need to decide whether they would like to submit their article in a general or a specialised journal. It is important that the authors consider the potential impact of their research within the research community. Ideally, the journal is well known and widely read in the research field. If the research article will be of interest to only a particular audience then a specialised journal would represent the most appropriate forum to publish in. In the interests of ensuring as wide-spread a dissemination of scientific information as possible, it is important to check if the journal is listed in significant and well-established databases and whether publication is also visible on an online publication platform. Furthermore, the authors need to establish whether the journal under consideration accepts the intended article type, such as reviews or case reports among others.

6. Journal impact factor

Another factor to be considered is the journal's impact factor. This factor takes into account the citation frequency of the journal's published articles within other journals. The validity of the impact factor as a metric of quality has been the subject of much discussion. A number of factors can influence the impact factor a journal achieves and these factors may not actually be a reflection of quality achieved. In spite of this, the journal impact factor remains the default method for determining journal standing. Authors may consider trying to publish in a high impact journal especially when their research article is of high importance within their research community. However authors must be cognizant of the fact that high impact factor journals receive a large volume of submissions annually and therefore there is much higher competition for acceptance of an article for publication [4].

7. Indexing

A number of indexing databases are readily available including PubMed, MedLine, SCOPUS, EMBASE among others. Journals indexed in any of these renowned indexing databases are considered as a reflection of the journal's quality. Authors may consider journals that are indexed in such databases as potentially more reliable and prestigious than journals not indexed or journals indexed in recently developed indexing databases.

8. Ways to identify reliable journals

There are a number of ways in which an author can identify reliable journals, including:

- The journal is well known to the author or to colleagues
- The journal website is easy to navigate with detailed information about the editorial board, type of peer review offered, details on the indexing databases
- The editorial board is composed of well-known experts in the research community
- Details on publication fees are easily identifiable
- Easily identifiable details on the publisher and contact details
- The publisher belongs to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) [5]
- If an open access journal, it should be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) [6] while the publisher belongs to the Open Access Scholarly Publisher's Association (OASPA) [7]

9. Ways to identify dubious open access journals

The number of open access predatory journals is on the increase. These journals offer a rapid publishing process at the cost of eliminating standards of peer or editorial board review. There are a number of ways to help the author to recognise such bogus journals:

- The journal requests a submission fee instead of a publication fee
- The editorial board is very small or else the website states that the list is "coming soon"
- A single publisher releases a large number of new journals simultaneously
- The website is of poor professional quality with the presence of fundamental grammar errors throughout
- The journal sends out unsolicited emails requesting submission of an article
- There are no valid address/phone or fax details making it impossible to contact the editor or the publisher in case of the need to claim reimbursement.

In order to aid authors in identifying these predatory journals, a number of online sources provide lists of potential, possible or probable predatory journals. One such list is the Jeffrey Beall guideline for authors [8].

Furthermore, authors need to be on the lookout for vanity press or vanity publishers, where publishing houses will offer a publishing service against payment with no quality control exercised as any time point.

10. Understanding journals' review and publication process

Once a particular journal has been selected, the author needs to evaluate the journal's review and publication process. Different journals will have different publication frequencies, varying from a biannual to bimonthly publication frequency. The journals that publish electronic issues only are more likely to have a more frequent publication frequency than those that publish a printed version of the issue.

Another aspect to consider is the turnaround times from submission of an article to receiving a decision (minor revision, major revision, acceptance or rejection) and eventual publishing of the article, provided the article was accepted. Subscription-based journals are more likely to have a longer turnaround time and publication delays than open-access journals.

The author needs to establish whether fees are applicable if coloured figures or photos are part of the submitted article.

Some journals may offer a hybrid publishing policy, where both a subscription-based and an open access policy are available. In such cases, the author has the choice to publish in whichever modality is convenient. Hence, it is important that the type of publication modality is stated upon submission of the article.

11. Traditional copyright vs creative commons licence

Authors publishing in subscription-based journals are normally bound by traditional copyright licence. This type of licence transfers the copyright of the article from the author to the journal's publisher. However, with the emergence of open access journals, a number of different copyright models have been created. In 2001, the *Creative Commons* (CC) licence was founded, whereby the author retains the right to be cited through a proper citation but gives permission for others to use and reuse the article including for commercial purposes [9,10]. This CC licence maximises the author's research impact within the scholar community. However, there are variations in this type of licencing and authors should read well the terms and conditions prior to submitting their work to a journal.

12. Conclusion

Scholars wishing to survive in highly competitive academic fora must publish or perish.. Targeting a potential journal requires an understanding of the different journal selection criteria that will determine the fate of their submitted article. Publication in predatory journals of dubious standing can harm a scholar's reputation as does publishing with “vanity press”. A number of web-based tools are available to aid authors in their publication venture.

Conflict of interest statement

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Sarah Cuschieri^a, Josanne Vassallo^{b,*},

^a *Anatomy Department, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Malta, Msida, Malta*

^b *Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Malta, Msida, Malta*

E-mail addresses: sarah.cuschieri@um.edu.mt (S. Cuschieri), josanne.vassallo@um.edu.mt (J. Vassallo).

* Corresponding author.