



Publishing Due Diligence

Video transcript

Hello, welcome to this short talk about publishing due diligence and how to support researchers and identify and trusted journals and publishers for their research. My name is Katherine Stephan, and I'm a research engagement librarian at Liverpool John Moores University. And I'm also the librarian representative at Think, Check, Submit.

So, I'm going to talk all about author due diligence. This takes time, but it can save you so much time and trouble and potential anxiety. This will be a short recording about how librarians can encourage author choice with due diligence. I'm not here to tell you where to publish, but I can help you with how authors might make those decisions. This session is not going to investigate why authors might choose to publish in predatory publications, but it will discuss how you can make sound choices to hopefully avoid them.

So, I've broken this talk into three parts. How we frame publishing more generally, three common scenarios and some final words of advice.

We frame problematic publishing as a wider issue of publishing more generally, you need to research before you write your research. And this should also extend to where you publish, too.

We run a lot of sessions about preparing to publish, publishing and then promoting your work after you publish. We begin all of our training by having researchers think about where they publish, and how they decide how to do so. This is to move authors towards thinking about publishing before they are publishing a paper. Often you can flag up problems around suitability cost, or if something is predatory. If authors are looking into the publication before committing to a publication.

We always promote the value of open access if and where possible. It covers us in the sense that we want researchers to consider the benefit to the world, complying with their funder and just being more

open in general. From our point of view, this is something that is embedded in all of our training, whether that searching for your research, publishing or sharing.

We always point out that there are both quantitative and qualitative measurements of quality. And it's important to consider both when deciding where to publish. If anything, we focus less on quantitative measures, and equating quality with a score that is given. We don't provide people with lists or talk about quartiles. We explain how things are ranked, but not as a marker of quality.

We always point out the principles outlined by Think. Check. Submit. We want authors to take ownership of their choices by being advocates for their own work.

Think.Check.Submit offers researchers a chance to step back and think before they make any choices. It's not a checklist, but it is things to think about to build confidence around your publication, and where you are thinking about publishing.

We will go through some of the above and further slides, but each are important. Have you read any articles in this publication? Can you find the latest papers? Have you heard of this journal? Does the ISSN check out? Can you tell who the publisher is? Is there a way to contact them?

Can you tell what their peer review process is? Or where it's indexed? If you go to that indexing site? Is the journal actually listed there?

Can you tell what the fees are? Or any guidelines for authors? Is the publisher part of any industry initiative or listed or hosted on any sites?

We try to inform people about those principles within Think.Check.Submit. But what does this mean in practice?

In our training, we discuss a lot about homes for your work. Too often researchers are thinking too narrowly about where they want to publish. And this often sits with what we think of as traditional publishing.

There are lots of different outputs and places that you might want to potentially publish your work. We move people away from the viewpoint that they may hear from supervisors, line managers, colleagues and others who tell them: This journal is best. You might be working with code, a poster, a case study.

This is a fantastic example of items in the Edge Hill repository from my colleague, Liam Bullingham. It gives you a snapshot of what's possible with publishing, i.e. not just journals. My university might be different than yours and how you approach deciding where to publish might also be different. But we talk a lot less about what are the best places and a lot more about the right places. Your right place might be a journal hosted by a university that has no impact factor. It might be a conference paper; it might be a blog post. I'm not here to tell you what is best, but I am here to tell you that you have options.

It's also worth it to say there is not a single list to check.

Lists are problematic for a number of reasons. A lot of people tell us that they're interested in lists, old ones like Bealls, subscription lists like Campbell's, and new ones like Bonafide journals. I have a problem with lists. It suggests that publishing is something that can be tackled simply. I understand why people want them, but they can be complex, overcomplicated and confusing. Who creates them, curates them, updates them? Who manages challenges to the lists? How many do you have? What are the right ones to use? In the Bonafide journals lists what is trusted by a library mean? Does being included in a deal mean that something is good? Even if you say check, indexing lists, not everything is in there, there's evidence to suggest that those indexing sites are often biased towards what is referred to as the global north and in English speaking publications. It's not just about my own time, which is limited, we don't have time to create our own list, let alone keep them up to date. Also, the time of the researchers, how do we make sure that everyone knows which lists and what happens to the people that don't know? Who does all the advocacy to keep everyone up to date? And what if you don't have a subscription to a list? A list suggests that the process can be achieved by checking one thing, and I'm uncomfortable advocating that, especially as I'm here to support researchers.

The other point is that you are not the list. My most uttered phrase with the uptake of many institutional open access agreements is almost certainly asked me and I can check. And I will continue to say this, I can check because this is part of my advocacy. And I can advise, but ultimately, I cannot check for every author, nor do I want to. And part of this is to educate them on how to check themselves.

Authors have a choice, and ultimately it is up to them. I am here to show them the choices and point out that they need to do due diligence. And when they decide, and ultimately, they do, hope they've done so. And when they have made bad choices, I am here to help them out of it. We want to avoid authors publishing in places where they have hidden charges, a journal that is problematic, one that isn't peer reviewed to the standard that they had hoped. But sometimes they do, that choice is theirs.

So, three common scenarios that I've heard of quite frequently as a librarian.

I've never heard of this journal. Where should I publish? And how do I know if something is problematic? And does this journal have a cost?

I've never heard of this journal. Should I publish here?

You might still get emails with misspelt words and very, very similar titles. But these days, I'm less inclined to suggest dismissing every email like that, in part because it doesn't happen as frequently. The first thing I do, is do a simple search and a basic search engine. You probably need to go past the first page. If you see that it's really similar to another title or see the search results of the title of that journal and then also, 'is this predatory'? Well, it might give you some caution.

At this age, it might seem okay, or you might have some hesitancy, no problem. This is what I do next. The first thing I always do is a simple search and try to find the actual journal. I go to the journal homepage and make sure the journal has aims and scope. Can I tell what they are writing about and what sort of articles they want? Can you see older articles and issues archived? Are they organised and easy to access? Are there editors listed? If there are, pick a few and search for them. Do they list editing this journal on their university webpage? Can you find them at the university? Does that university exist? Do their pages highlight how quickly things are published as a selling point? Many times, this is enough information for me to decide. If some of those above aren't listed, I may continue to be skeptical. Finally, can I tell what the costs are? Are these easy to locate? And then are they clear with regards to what and how much you're paying for? If the above checkout, I will also check to see if there is any truth to their metrics claims. Again, I'm not worried about the size of the metric. I'm checking to see if what they said checks out. If they have listed a metric like journal impact factor, I might see if this is corroborated with Journal Citation Reports. If it only lists something that I can't check on, I proceed with caution.

If I'm still not sure I check some more. If a journal says that it's indexed someplace, I follow that up. If they don't, I check other another place I look and see if it's listed in sites like Sherpa Romeo. I often use the Directory of Open Access Journals, Scopus and Web of Science. Not all of the above are free. But to search for index titles, for example, you can use the Scopus free version. Crucially, these are not comprehensive. But in my experience, if you're not listed in any of these spaces, and I still can't tell if you're real, then perhaps that should give you pause. And let me be clear, this might not mean that this is problematic. But if you still can't tell, and you still aren't sure, you've got to decide for yourself.

Where should I publish? And how do I know if something is predatory or problematic?

As I mentioned before, authors have a choice. I see part of my job is to offer up choices, but also alternatives.

I always say to the authors, say to authors, the above, where are you reading? Where do people that you admire, publish? If you're approached by a journal that you've never heard of out of the blue, is that where you want to put your hard work?

This also goes back to cost and that due diligence, what can you afford? Are there some options that are no longer available to you? You may have been approached by a legitimate journal that has a high article processing charge. If you don't have to publish here to make your work open access, and you do have options? Is it worth it to pay money? If you publish here, who will be able to read your work? Is your intended audience still going to be able to reach it?

It's all about your options. And this is going to depend on what's available at your institution. So at my institution, I discuss our institutional Open Access deals, I take people to the Directory of Open Access Journals, and I show them how to filter and search for options that don't have an article processing charge. I also use things I also use journal finders from publishers and also ones like Jane.

Does this journal have a cost?

My institution does not have an open access fund to pay for open access publishing unless you are funded. We make this very clear on our webpages when we do advocacy, and when people ask if they can publish somewhere. This is also why we ask people to come to us to check as we literally have no money to help you, if you choose to pay. publishers don't always make it easy with charges, you often need to know where to look and that can be difficult to know which route fits what you are doing. I see this as very integral to my advocacy. You must know before you choose to submit and if you don't know, ask someone else. I appreciate that this may be separate from predatory or problematic publishing, you may be happy to pay, but if you can't, you must check beforehand.

Publishers often add charges for going over the word count and colour charges. Authors also need to be aware that there may be charges for these options, too. My university has some institutional deals, but I have to make authors aware these do not cover the above. Being aware of cost does not necessarily mean you won't be impacted by problematic publishing. But you will be aware of your upfront costs. Know the costs. If you aren't sure, ask and if you have to ask, keep that email.

So, some final words of advice.

What happens if you have to retract or remove an article?

Don't panic. It happens. It does. And it happens to people that are more established than you think. Move on, learn from your mistakes, ask for help, and do more due diligence in the future. If there is a way out, it might be worth it to speak to your legal department, if you do have one. We were able to get an article retracted because of a discrepancy with regard to cost. Note, that this is not always the case. If you prefer not to be associated with that article, do not link, note or refer to it. If the work still stands, don't feel as though all is lost-your work might be the best thing about that issue. Don't be tempted to resubmit. Just because you don't like the journal or publication doesn't mean you can reuse it and submit it elsewhere. There may be issues of copyright involved. And move on-it happens don't beat yourself up over it.

Helping researchers find a home for their work is also about research culture and how we measure where people publish. You can be an advocate for how and why we measure. Universities can help and as a librarian, you can advocate for author choice that isn't based solely on numbers. This is a wider issue of how we measure research and researchers. Our publications on CVs checked? Could you consider the narrative CV approach?

And also, this is a wider issue that extends beyond researchers, libraries and scholarly communications. Overall, we need to think more about quality over quantity.

Remember, there is not a single list to check.

If you aren't sure, ask for help.

And remember, think, check, and then submit.

Thank you for listening.