



Compass to Publish

Looking back at the development and uses of a tool to help identify predatory journals: challenges and lessons learned

Presentation to DOAJ's Managing Editors' team - April 18, 2024

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What it is, and what it's not





- Free online tool to help the community determine the degree of authenticity of journals
 - app.lib.uliege.be/compass-to-publish/



helps you determine the degree of authenticity of open access journals requiring or hiding article processing charges (APCs) using a criteria-based evaluation

aims to **help the scholarly community to better understand** predatory journals and publishers

offers a **transparent methodology and weighing method**



is not designed for open access journals **that explicitly state that they do not require** article processing charges (APCs)

does not evaluate the quality of a journal, but its **degree of authenticity**

does not pretend to offer an **exhaustive list of criteria** for the identification of predatory journals

does not pretend to offer a **formal evaluation** in a few clicks, but aims to **involve researchers** in a **critical** and analytical process

Short tutorial (in French but subtitles in English available)





How does it work?

1. Trusted lists

unspecified journal

End the test



1.1. Is the journal indexed in the DOAJ (*Directory of Open Access Journals*)? Check here.

Yes No I don't know



Progress

- Answer a series of questions and see where the journal stands in the spectrum of colors
 - the more red, the more questionable a journal
 - the greener, the safer the journal
- 26 questions (yes/no/I don't know) classified in 7 categories (trusted lists, indexing & metrics...)
 - Negative, positive, or null points for every question answered > Final Score
- Help/guidance on where or how to check
- Min. of 5 questions answered to get results without disclaimer 'You did not answer...'

1. Trusted lists

unspecified journal

End the test

1.3. Is the publisher or the journal a member of OASPA (the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association)? Check here.

Yes No I don't know

Previous



Progress

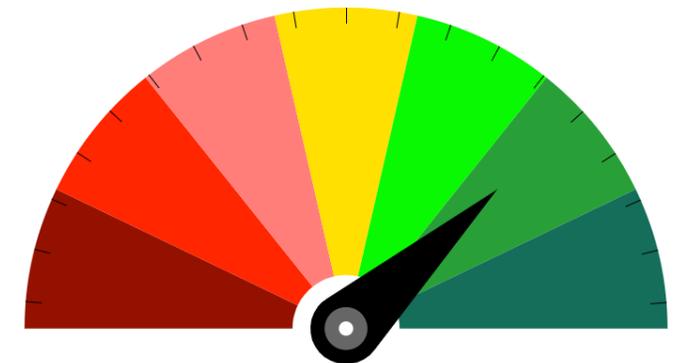
Next

Results for unspecified journal

You did not answer enough questions for the test to be accurate.

This is most likely not a predatory journal.

Show details





**Why a DO-IT-YOURSELF tool?
And why a spectrum of
authenticity?**

Je vous contacte concernant l'authenticité d'un journal scientifique dans lequel mon papier est accepté. Le journal en question est le suivant : Chemical & Pharmaceutical Research, ISSN: 2689-1050 (site web : <https://www.scivisionpub.com/journals/chemical-pharmaceutical-research-home>), je souhaiterais bénéficier de votre expertise et savoir s'il s'agit d'une revue prédatrice.



- Guidance & information requests from researchers
 - Diversity of answers from subject librarians
 - Opinions divided regarding certain criteria and tools
- Analysis of Cabell's Predatory Reports as a possible solution for guidance resource (not implemented because lack of nuance and reliability)
- Willingness to :
 - Promote a more nuanced answer than a rigid binary (predatory vs. non predatory) > spectrum
 - Avoid static history/diagnosis (present in lists)
 - Engage researchers in the evaluation process so as to increase awareness and understanding (rather than proxies for evaluation, e.g. list-only approach)
 - Promote more transparency in the identification/evaluation process
- Decision to develop a specific tool to meet these objectives

The screenshot shows the article page for "How reliable and useful is Cabell's Blacklist ? A data-driven analysis" in LIBER QUARTERLY, Vol. 30 No. 1 (2020). The authors listed are Christophe Dony, Maurane Raskinet, François Renaville, Stéphanie Simon, and Paul Thirion, all from ULiège Library, University of Liège, Belgium. The page includes navigation buttons for PDF, XML, NOTES, and REFERENCES, and a DOI link: <https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10339>. The article was published on 2020-09-10.



**What criteria?
And how do we operationalize them
to develop a tool that can
meet these objectives?**



- ▶ Survey of different guides and checklists to identify the most salient and recurrent criteria
- ▶ Benchmark with
 - our own experiences (subject librarians > some criteria are problematic for particular SSH journals)
 - Scholarly literature on the topic



Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing



APPLY

Guide to applying

Table 1 Characteristics of a predatory journal

From: The false academy: predatory publishing in science and bioethics

The publisher is not a member of any recognized professional organisation committed to best publishing practices (like COPE or EASE)
The journal is not indexed in well-established electronic databases (like Medline or Web of Science)
The publisher claims to be a "leading publisher" even though it just got started
The journal and the publisher are unfamiliar to you and all your colleagues
The papers of the journal are of poor research quality, and may not be academic at all (for instance allowing for obvious pseudo-science)
There are fundamental errors in the titles and abstracts, or frequent and repeated typographical or factual errors throughout the published papers
The journal website is not professional
The journal website does not present an editorial board or gives insufficient detail on names and affiliations
The journal website does not reveal the journal's editorial office location or uses an incorrect address
The publishing schedule is not clearly stated

CABELLS

The Source

MARCH 20, 2019 | THE SOURCE | PREDATORY

Cabells Predatory Reports Criteria v 1.1



- Very long initial list of questions/criteria (>70)
- Many revisions of the list
 - Grouping of questions
 - Unnecessary questions (e.g. presence of APC mentioned > dismissed by explanation on homepage)



is not designed for open access journals that explicitly state that they do not require article processing charges (APCs)

- Focus on user experience and usability (i.e. users will go away if too many questions or too difficult)

1	Listes faisant autorité		
1.1	La revue est-elle présente dans le DOAJ ? Vérifier ici.	10	0
1.2	La revue est-elle présente sur l'un des portails Open Access suivants ? OpenEdition PoPub	15	0
1.3	La maison d'édition (publisher) ou la revue est-elle membre de COPE ?	10	0
1.4	La maison d'édition (publisher) ou la revue est-elle membre de l'OASPA?	10	0
1.5	La revue est-elle publiée par une maison d'édition reconnue ?	10	0
2	BlackList		
2.1	La revue est-elle présente dans la Liste négative du DOAJ ?	-10	0
2.2	La revue est-elle présente dans les listes "Stop Predatory" ?	-3	0
3	Est-ce une contrefaçon d'une vraie revue ?		
3.1	La revue dans laquelle vous envisagez de publier est-elle une contrefaçon ?	-10	0
3.2	La maison d'édition a-t-elle un nom étrangement similaire à celui d'une autre maison d'édition ?	-5	0
3.3	L'ISSN ou eISSN affiché sur le site de la revue est-il authentique ?	0	-10
4	Référencement et métriques		
4.1	La revue a-t-elle un véritable Impact Factor (Clarivate Analytics TM)?	10	0
4.2	La revue renseigne-t-elle un indice douteux, par exemple dont le nom ressemble à l'Impact Factor ?	-5	0
4.3	Les bases de données mentionnées sur le site de la revue répertorient-elles réellement cette revue ?	0	-3
4.4	La revue prétend-elle être indexée par des outils n'effectuant aucune sélection ni contrôle de qualité ?	-3	0
5	Le comité de rédaction (editorial board)		
5.1	Les membres du comité de rédaction sont-ils mentionnés ?	0	-5
5.2	Les membres du comité de rédaction et en particulier l'éditeur en chef vous semblent-ils légitimes ?	3	-3
5.3	Font-ils état de leur rôle dans cette revue dans leur CV, sur le site de l'institution à laquelle ils sont affiliés ?	2	-4
6	Comment avez-vous connu cette revue ?		
6.1	Je connais cette revue parce qu'elle est citée à de nombreuses reprises dans d'autres articles ?	2	0
6.2	Je connais cette revue parce que un ou plusieurs collègues expérimentés de mon réseau y ont écrit ?	2	0
6.3	Je connais cette revue parce que je connais ou je suis le travail de membres du comité de rédaction ?	2	0
6.4	Je connais cette revue parce qu'un collègue expérimenté me l'a recommandée	1	0
7	Pratiques de la maison d'édition		
7.1	La maison d'édition prétend-elle que la revue est importante et reconnue dans son domaine ?	-2	0
7.2	Recevez-vous beaucoup de courriels non sollicités (spam) de la part de membres du comité de rédaction ?	-3	0

Early-stage example of list of criteria with tentative scoring



- In the end, 26 questions/criteria organized in 7 thematic categories with their scoring, all of which are displayed on the "Methodology" webpage.
- Organization of criteria for users :
 - Is weight-relative (highest scores first)
 - Follows an objectivity continuum (from verifiable information to more subjective criteria)
- Subjective criteria are there to level the playing field for journals whose procedures or protocols cannot easily be found or verified.

Criteria and scoring

1. Trusted lists

2. Lists of alleged predatory journals and publishers (often referred to as *blacklists*)

3. Hijacked journals

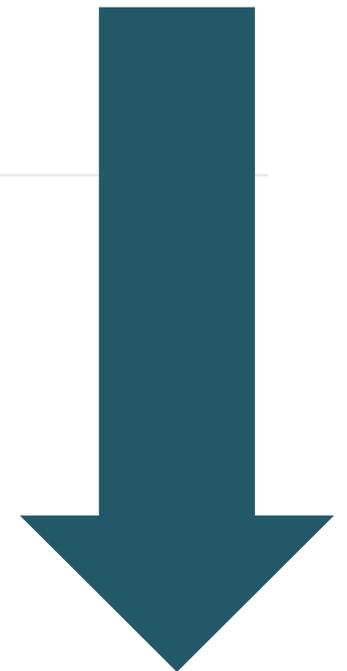
4. Indexing and metrics

5. Editorial board and peer review

6. Content and presentation

7. Communication strategies

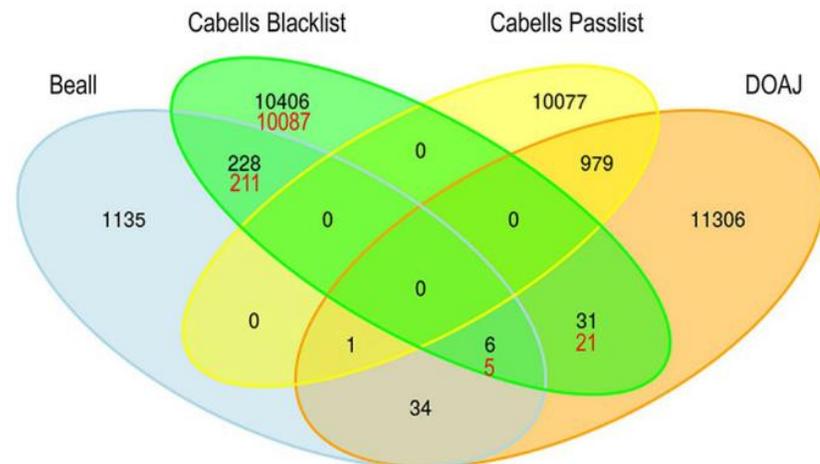
High score/objective



Lower score/more subjective



- Many versions of scoring too with preliminary journal testing and hands-on approach:
 - Randomly selected DOAJ journals
 - OA journals requiring fees not in DOAJ
 - Crawford, Walt (2016). Gray OA 2012-2016: Gold OA Beyond DOAJ. figshare. Dataset. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.4275860.v1>
 - Journals at the intersection of several lists:
 - Strinzel M, Severin AMilzow K, Egger M 2019. Blacklists and Whitelists To Tackle Predatory Publishing: a Cross-Sectional Comparison and Thematic Analysis. MBio. <https://doi.org/10.1128/mbio.00411-19>
- Room left to uncertainty (so-called "grey area" of the binary logic), which is shown to users
- Scale goes from -20 to +20 (even if points can artificially go higher) > not shown to users

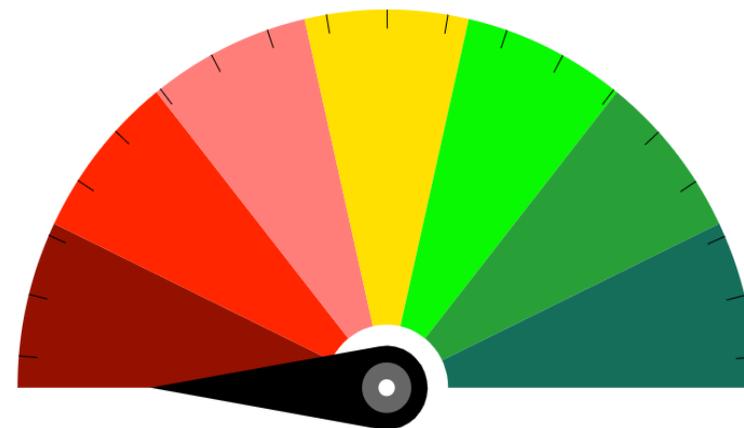




**How do you know what was
incriminating and what was not?**

➤ User-oriented results with context

Your answers indicate that the journal is very likely to be predatory. It is best to avoid it altogether.



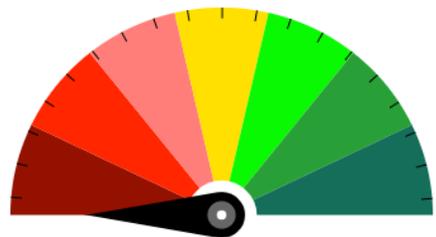
This journal has already been tested. See the other results [here](#).

Show details

Answers

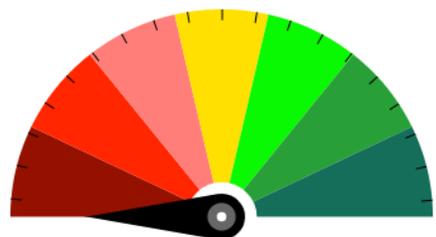
1.1 Is the journal indexed in the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)? Check here.	No
1.2 Is the journal hosted on one of the Open Access platforms below? Check OpenEdition PoPuPS SciELO	No
1.3 Is the publisher or the journal a member of OASPA (the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Associati...	No
1.4 Is the publisher or the journal a member of COPE (the Committee on Publication Ethics)? Check here	No
1.5 Is the journal published by a well-known publisher?	No
2.1 Is the journal included the DOAJ's list of journals claiming to be indexed in DOAJ (Directory of ...	No
2.2 Is the journal or publisher included in one of the lists on the website Stop Predatory Journals?C...	No
3.1 Is the ISSN or eISSN included on the journal's website authentic? Check here.	No
3.2 Is the journal you are testing a hijacked journal? Check the Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Ch...	No
3.3 Does the publisher have a strangely similar name to another publisher?	No
4.1 Does the journal have the registered trademark "Impact Factor" (Clarivate Analytics TM)? Check here.	No
4.2 Does the journal pretend to have an "Impact Factor", or does it use questionable metrics whose na...	No
4.3 Is the journal really included in the various databases mentioned on its website? Check on MIAR	I don't know
5.1 Are the editorial board members mentioned on the website?	No

Journal : Polish journal of science
 Start : 09/04/2024 11:54:37
 End : 09/04/2024 12:12:33



Current test

Journal : Polish Journal of Science
 Start : 17/04/2024 02:16:17
 End : 17/04/2024 02:22:21



- Other results as a source of information context
 - Can be a flaw, e.g. if tests are poorly done or manipulated
 - This feature is only visible after completion of a test, not before
 - Other results only shown if certain conditions in the test are met



3.1 Is the ISSN or eISSN included on the journal's website authentic? Check here.	No
3.2 Is the journal you are testing a hijacked journal? Check the Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Ch...	I don't know
3.3 Does the publisher have a strangely similar name to another publisher?	I don't know
4.1 Does the journal have the registered trademark "Impact Factor" (Clarivate Analytics TM)? Check here.	No
4.2 Does the journal pretend to have an "Impact Factor", or does it use questionable metrics whose na...	No
4.3 Is the journal really included in the various databases mentioned on its website? Check on MIAR	No
5.1 Are the editorial board members mentioned on the website?	Yes
5.2 Do the members of the editorial board seem legitimate, especially the editor-in-chief?	I don't know
5.3 Does the possibly announced peer review policy seem surprisingly rapid for your discipline(s)?	Yes
6.1 Are the journal's articles really free and open for access?	Yes
6.2 Is the journal's website obviously author-oriented rather than reader-oriented?	Yes
6.3 If contact details of the journal / publisher can easily be identified, do they look legitimate?	Yes



Some lessons learned



- Even if conceived as a DIY tool; guidance is often necessary to help users navigate the test/questions, especially for young career researchers
- Tool presented and used in PhD workshops with more contextualization (not mandatory)
 - Dony, C. (2023). Predatory journals: what do they refer to and how to detect them? Christophe Dony. Retrieved from <https://christophedony.pubpub.org/pub/rah328v5>

The screenshot shows a dark-themed article page. At the top, there are two tabs: 'Open Science' and 'training materials'. To the right, it says 'Published on Oct 30, 2023' and 'SHOW DETAILS'. The main title is 'Predatory journals: what do they refer to and how to detect them?'. Below the title is a subtitle: 'Training materials used for an in-person workshop about predatory journals proposed to researchers and other staff members at the University of Liège.' The author is listed as 'by Christophe Dony'. At the bottom left, there is a 'last released 5 months ago' badge with a clock icon. On the right side, there is a vertical menu with options: 'CITE', 'SOCIAL', 'DOWNLOAD', and 'CONTENTS'.

Foreword

Please note that the contents below do not pretend to exhaustively cover the topic of predatory journals, a very contested topic altogether. Rather, they are used as training materials in workshops proposed to staff members of the University of Liège.



- Tool's history shows that users :
 - spend little time going through the test (in average between 5-10 min.)
 - answer an average of 10 questions out of the 26 ('I don't know' answers excluded)
 - test a lot of similar journals > possible group use by lab/research unit/workshops?

- Tool's history also reflects some poor uses of the tool:
 - Tests of non-OA journals (not intended)
 - Tests of clear OA journals without fees (poor understanding of the publishing ecosystem/landscape?)

- Tool's history does not show questionable results (red) for journals a clear high degree of authenticity (>consistency in results)

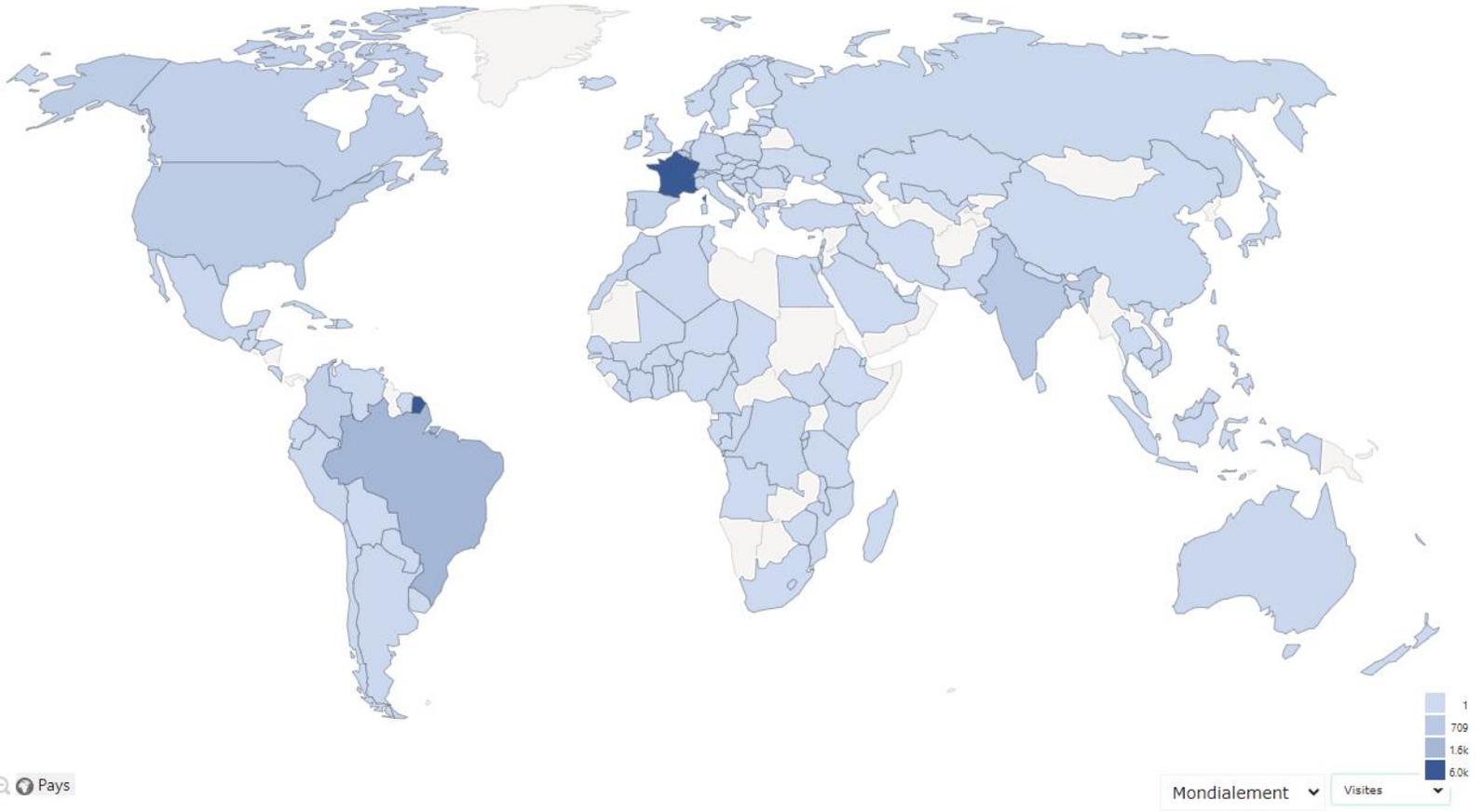
- Some advanced users regret the tool categorizes Frontiers, MDPI, and Hindawi journals as authentic (i.e. green), especially in light of recent research integrity issues (mass retractions, fake peer review, authorship for sale etc.)
 - Currently, the tool does not really take into consideration integrity issues such as these. Rather, it focuses on protocols and procedures (trust) > Possible development
 - This being said, if a journal gets delisted from certain indexes or resource, the scoring will reflect this in a new test

- Since November 2021, 14 675 website visits with at least one action (1 click)
- An average of ~300 tests (finished or >2 min) per month
- International reach with important uptake in France



Carte des visiteurs

14 675 visites



Pays

PAYS	VISITES
 France	6 005
 Brésil	1 572
 Inde	709
 Belgique	656
 Suisse	568
 États-Unis	558
 Canada	416
 Colombie	360
 Portugal	264
 Taïwan	235



**Thanks for your attention.
Any questions?**