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Dr. David Cabell began his work almost 40 years ago with the goal of providing information on academic journals to researchers, tenure committees, professors, and doctoral students to guide them in their decision-making process. What began as a class project for Dr. Cabell all those years ago soon grew into a printed list providing basic contact information for journals in just one discipline. With Dr. Cabell at the helm, Cabells has grown and evolved along with the scholarly community over the years, working at every turn to address the needs of academics.

Today, Cabells has expanded its services to include both the Journal Whitelist and Journal Blacklist, manuscript preparation tools, and a suite of powerful metrics. Through continued partnerships with major academic publishers, journal editors, scholarly societies, accreditation agencies, and other independent databases, Cabells provides accurate, up-to-date information to help its users—from more than 750 universities worldwide—find journal information and navigate the publishing process, no matter their career stage or role in academia.

Know Better Journals with the Journal Whitelist

The Journal Whitelist is a searchable, curated database of more than 11,000 international scholarly publications covering 18 academic disciplines. Each journal is thoroughly investigated and reviewed against a strict set of criteria before being selected for inclusion, which is by invitation only. Specialists evaluate every publication in the Journal Whitelist by performing a full audit of the journal’s policies and procedures to verify that the journal is legitimate and reputable. Among the criteria used when selecting journals for the Journal Whitelist are the following:

- Direct relation and relevancy to a particular field of study and audience
- Sponsorship by professional associations and/or government agencies
- Quality measures such as integrity, objectivity, substantive merit, and relevancy
- The existence of a rigorous peer-review process must be evident
- Clearly stated publication fees, policies, and practices

There are several different facets of journal quality to consider, some more relevant than others to different users, depending on the reason for their evaluation. Researchers, after spending countless hours conducting and preparing their work for presentation, need an objective source of information to maximize the impact of and recognition for their work in their respective field of study. The key is to find not just a reputable publication, but one that reaches the audience that will benefit the most from (and provide the biggest boost to) a researcher’s work.

University administrators and tenure committees will use the Journal Whitelist to gauge faculty contributions and research productivity and to evaluate listed publications on CVs and applications. Administrators and hiring committees are not experts in each field they must evaluate and staff—the Journal Whitelist makes comparing applicants’ research objectives meaningful to those on the periphery of a given field of study.

The first level of journal information (bibliographic information, editor contacts, submission and manuscript guidelines, access type, etc.) is necessary to be sure, but the use of intelligent data allows the user to dig deeper. There is no one magic measurement that can gauge a journal’s legitimacy or prestige. There are, however, certain metrics that when taken together paint a fairly clear picture of what one can expect from a journal in terms of quality, audience, and relevancy. Practical, real-world data is what allows a user to make the most informed and confident decisions.

The Cabells Classification Index measures how a journal compares to others in each discipline and topic in which it publishes, providing an estimate of the impact a paper might have in that specific field of study. The Journal Impact Factor released in Journal Citation Reports certainly has limitations when used alone, but its measure of the average number of citations a paper in a specific journal receives further clarifies the picture of a journal’s influence and gives users a way to evaluate, rank, and compare journals. Going further and
serving as the perfect complement to traditional citation-based metrics is the Altmetric Report, a journal-level attention metric that captures instances where research articles are mentioned in the news, on the web, and on social media. This report gives users a way to see the real-world impact of a journal and estimate how much media attention an article published in that journal might receive.

The Journal Whitelist was built for the purpose of providing information on reputable journals. That core goal remains but has evolved over time to allow for critical journal evaluations and comparisons through the use of journal quality metrics such as the ones mentioned above. Of course, not every journal considered for inclusion in the Journal Whitelist makes the cut, for any number of reasons. A publication may be new and still establishing its identity in the academic landscape, or perhaps it is lacking in certain ways and failing to meet industry standards in important areas, lowering the overall quality of the publication.

Indeed, these are reasons to deny a publication’s inclusion in the Journal Whitelist, to leave them in the gray area populated by scores of journals. However, there is a need to identify a different breed of publication, one that is not simply new or incompetent, but fraudulent, deceptive, or outright predatory.

Know the Threats with the Journal Blacklist

Predatory journals have rapidly increased their publication volume in recent years and exist as a thorn in the side of the academic community. They not only undermine scholarly communication but also damage science at large by allowing subpar work to be published alongside legitimate research, weakening the overall body of knowledge in a given field. The rise of digital publishing in academia has made launching academic journals easier than ever and has done much to advance the democratization of research. It is also now easier than ever to create fake or deceptive journals whose only purpose is to defraud researchers and academic institutions.

The key to any evaluative exercise is objectivity and transparency; there can be no hidden agenda, no ulterior motives, and the process must be clear. These are the keystones to the Journal Blacklist, the only searchable database that identifies deceptive and fraudulent journals. Suspected journals are examined against over 65 behavioral indicators in areas including integrity, peer review, and publication and business practices to flag potentially exploitative or dishonest operations. Among the more common violations are the following:

- Accepting manuscripts and fees, with no intention of ever publishing the work
- Publication mills providing complicit researchers an easy path to publication
- Hijacking legitimate journal names, websites, logos, etc., in an effort to capture fees from authors who believe they are submitting to the hijacked publication

As in life, not all journals fall into either the “good” or “bad” area; there is plenty of gray area. The Journal Blacklist leaves out those journals in the gray area of the academic landscape and is instead built specifically to flag only journals that intend to deceive and exploit. To this end, the Journal Blacklist criteria are weighted and assigned a score based on the severity of the offense—not all offenses are created equal, after all. A score of 100+ qualifies a journal for inclusion in the Journal Blacklist. This scale was established specifically to prevent journals that are simply new or incompetent from being blacklisted.

A hallmark of the predatory journal is charging researchers to publish and then not delivering on the stated or implied promises. There are many variations on this theme, but almost all predatory journals sacrifice integrity for profit or prestige. Some researchers knowingly submit their work to predatory publications looking for a shortcut to publication, while others are duped into submitting their work. Whatever the reason, the Journal Blacklist sheds light on these fraudulent operations and each entry provides information on how to identify the journal as well as a comprehensive report of each behavioral indicator that was uncovered in the journal’s evaluation. Just as important as knowing whether or not a journal has been identified as predatory, is being aware of the reasons for the classification. As mentioned above, not all violations are created equal—some can be chalked up to incompetence, some have more sinister motives.

An entry in the Journal Blacklist serves as a way for users to identify predatory journals with information such as its title, claimed ISNs, country of origin, claimed discipline, and website, and a misconduct report that categorizes and details each violation to provide a transparent view of the investigated journal. Using this data, researchers can know if an invitation to publish is legitimate, if research has been peer reviewed, or if a potential research outlet is reliable and reputable.

By investigating each journal in the Cabells database and providing actionable intelligence and metrics, the Journal Whitelist and Journal Blacklist serve academia by providing an unbiased and comprehensive picture of legitimacy and quality, allowing the community to not only know better journals, but to also know the threats. For more information on the Journal Whitelist, the Journal Blacklist, and the criteria used to build each database, please visit www.cabells.com.
When a Cupcake Isn’t Just a Cupcake: Identifying Qualitative and Quantitative Indicators in Scholarly Publishing

By Phaedra Cress, Phill Jones, and Mark Johnston

Well, it depends on what they want from the journal. Most authors want (need!) the validation of their work that comes from having their manuscript accepted for publication by high-impact journals. In general, the more competitive and well-known the journal is, the more valuable that validation is and the more useful that line on the CV is with hiring, promotion, and tenure committees. Because higher selectivity usually translates into a higher Impact Factor score, that metric is foremost in most authors’ minds, especially in Europe and Asia, where grant funding and career advancement are often closely linked to publication in such journals.

But is that really why authors publish their research? Researchers do what they do out of a desire to expand human knowledge, solve problems, and save lives. They want their work to be published accurately and quickly, with appropriate quality control so that others know that it’s good. All too often, they are forced to rely on proxy measures like Impact Factor simply because no direct indicators of publisher or journal service quality exist.

Regardless of their reasons, authors want and deserve a smooth publishing experience. Publishers are communication service providers, and authors want to know how well publishers do in providing the services they offer.

What does this have to do with baking?

Project Cupcake is a new initiative that aims to understand how authors might be provided with useful information to inform their submission decisions. Cupcakers are working to provide frameworks for robust qualitative and quantitative journal-level indicators that illustrate how well publishers serve authors and the scientific community, or how well they’re baking their cakes. The frameworks should enable the development of quality of service indicators such as time to decision and publication; quality of editor guidance; journal production values; availability of open access options; extent of article promotion; standards of discoverability and preservation; and editor-in-chief and editorial board reputation. Simply put, we’re laying the groundwork for indicators that will help...
authors find answers to these relevant questions prior to submission.

We don’t fully know what can be reliably or reasonably measured yet, but questions might include:

- How long do editors take to decide whether a paper is suitable for publication?
- How long until an article appears in the journal, and will it publish online in advance of print?
- How many reviewers did the journal consult?
- Does the journal really conduct peer review?
- Did the editors synthesize the reviewers’ comments into a clear decision?
- Do the editors provide helpful guidance about how to improve the manuscript for publication?
- What is the quality of the journal’s production values?
- Is it really copyedited or merely spell-checked?
- Is the article’s layout and design appealing; does it make the article easy to read?
- Are there word count, citation, and figure/table limitations?

The answers to those questions—and many more—influence an author’s overall publishing experience and the attention and recognition their article receives. Finding this information is surprisingly challenging. One can find whitelists of journals that adhere to certain publishing principles, such as one offered by Cabells, who also recently launched a blacklist inspired by Beall’s list. Indexing services such as Web of Science and Scopus serve as de facto whitelists of journals with good publishing practices. While knowing a journal is not predatory is useful, few of these lists offer answers to most of the questions authors really care about.

Authors can easily find the Impact Factor of a journal, but they have a hard time finding other (arguably more important) information about the quality of the services the publisher offers them. A few journals publish metrics such as time-to-decision and time-to-publication, but that information is seldom easy to find, and is usually considered proprietary. This often leads to buyer’s remorse, in which the author grumbles: ‘Why did I submit there? How did I miss the fact that it could take 12 months to get my paper published?’ We see you nodding your head!

More than 50 volunteers from across the scholarly publishing ecosystem are currently engaged in six working groups to develop the Project Cupcake indicators that will supplement and enhance scholarly communication metrics as they continue to evolve beyond the Journal Impact Factor.

Though we can’t promise authors they’ll be the next Cake Boss, we intend to arm them with the tools they need to make smart choices for their manuscript submissions. Stay tuned, and we shall keep you apprised as our work evolves.
We, at the SfEP, are very glad to have the opportunity to let the members of ISMTE know about our organisation and its aims; thank you for asking us.

Who or what is the SfEP? The letters stand for the Society for Editors and Proofreaders, and our members are first and foremost engaged in editing and proofreading material for clients and publishers to ensure that copy is correct in grammar, spelling and punctuation, consistent throughout the text, and that the meaning of the text is clear and easily comprehended.

The Society was formed in 1988 to provide support for editorial freelances who mostly worked alone and could feel isolated. In 2001, membership was widened to include in-house editorial staff and the organisation became a professional body under the name of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP).

The only thing that the SfEP doesn’t provide for its members is actual work, although it does its best to provide the information, guidance, and resources to enable members to find work more easily. The SfEP is increasingly known for its training courses, many of which are now online, and many publishing houses look especially for SfEP members when they need freelances as they know they will be well prepared.

Our members work on an increasingly wide range of editorial work. Once mostly engaged by traditional publishing houses, SfEP members now work for digital publishers, corporates, businesses, online companies, universities, self-publishing authors, journals, website owners, students, and more. We edit a huge range of subjects in UK English, US English, and non-native English. Almost all work is done onscreen, using sophisticated computer software—the red pencils have been retired to the desk drawer. Many work on scientific, technical, or medical text (STM), often after a career in medicine, engineering, or science, so they offer technical knowledge as well as editorial skills.

Editing of academic text—books, journal articles, or theses—makes up a substantial part of many SfEP members’ work, while a fast-growing section of the membership works on fiction, from all genres, now that self-publishing has become respectable. A considerable portion of our members are also indexers, and we have close ties with the Society of Indexers.

The SfEP offers several grades of membership depending on skills and experience, ranging from Entry Level to Advanced Professional Level. Members are actively encouraged to ‘upgrade,’ using a points system based on training courses, skills, and acquired experience. Gaining Professional or Advanced Professional standard is rewarded with the eagerly sought benefit of an entry in the SfEP online Directory of Editorial Services: a listing of members with their skills, experience, and contact details available to anyone looking for an editorial expert. Not all our members are freelance—there are many working in-house for publishers or in communications or marketing departments in both the private and public sector.

Every SfEP member ‘signs up’ to the Society’s extensive Code of Practice which helps to promote the high standards that form the hallmark of the SfEP. At subscription renewal time, all members are asked to answer a question on something from the Code of Practice before being able to renew. New members can test their skills by taking a basic editorial test, and there are plans to introduce further tests at a higher level. Recently, the Society has set out on the path to becoming a Chartered Institution, which will give SfEP members a recognised professional status and accreditation.

Members live all over the United Kingdom and Ireland with others further afield in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other overseas locations. There are local groups which meet regularly to allow members to get together, exchange ideas and knowledge, and make useful contacts. There are several online forums where members in need of assistance can post queries about aspects of editing and proofreading, and the collective wisdom of SfEP members always comes to the rescue. The annual conference is
very popular and attracts high-calibre speakers and discussions and offers an eclectic range of sessions on topics from reference checking to life-work balance. The SfEP website has a mass of information as well as a blog, and social media is used to good effect. The Society publishes a series of Guides on aspects of editorial work and an online magazine, every two months, for and about the members.

We are working hard to get ourselves even better known and welcome enquiries about membership. Above all, we want not to hear people say, as they still do, ‘What is the SfEP?’ but to hear them say ‘Yes, I know about the SfEP!’

Visit www.sfep.org.uk or the SfEP blog for more information, and follow SfEP on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

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**Why Reinvent the Twist?**

By Alice M. Landwehr  
LinkedIn | @landwehr_am

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**Stock Phrases: Why Use Them?**

Stock phrases, standard responses, boilerplate—whatever you like to call them, the reason for them is simple: They are gigantic, enormous time savers!

How many emails do you receive every day from authors asking about the status of their submissions? How many are from reviewers who want an extension on a deadline? How many times do you need to re-create the same message? Do you type out your name, title, journal name, journal website, URL for your online submission and review system, and instructions for authors every time you send an email? How do you value your time?

Using stock phrases allows me to respond to routine inquiries using as little time as possible and better devote my time to the tasks that need more effort and attention. I have a master document of stock phrases that I’ve developed over the years. I modify it as needed: I think of better wording, a new situation comes up (even after all these years, it happens!), or a journal policy/procedure changes. But, I’ll tell you, another wonderful thing about this document is that it records a way to respond to matters that do not come up frequently. Maybe I’ll cover one of those in a future piece.

**Highlighted Stock Phrase: Responding to the Author Status Inquiry**

**Standard response to author status queries**

All right, let’s start off easy with a stock phrase I use all the time: the author status inquiry. I’ll go over when to use it and why it’s written the way it is. This is my standard response when an author asks about the status of a submission and it was sent to reviewers:

Thank you for your email. Your manuscript is currently under review. When all reviews are received, the editors will make a decision, and you will be notified immediately.

A key part to this response is that under no circumstances can I ever provide a time for the review or a date by which the decision will be made. This is generally against journal policy and against my own training—and it’s just sensible. It is rare that we as editorial support staff can ever make promises or guarantees. Don’t say that the authors will get a decision by October 9 or even within a week, unless you are absolutely certain you can make that happen. (My crystal ball is broken, so I can’t!)

Also, for some journals, the subject matter expert (SME) editors enter decisions and send the decision letters; for others, SME editors enter decisions and editorial staff send the decision letters (after checking and perhaps correcting or modifying a number of things). Either way, a decision is not officially made until the decision letter is sent. So even if the SME editors enter a decision, it can in theory still change. Do not complicate matters by telling authors too much information; for example, “Editor A has entered a decision, but Editor B hasn’t seconded it. Also, one of the reviewers put her name in the Comments for Authors. We now need to confirm whether she really wants to reveal her name.” (If your journal even allows this.) Don’t do it! The decision is not officially made until the letter is sent. Period. For such a short stock phrase, there is a lot of subtext behind it.

**Variations to responding to author status queries**

Stock phrases should be modified when needed. When the submission is a revision, I simply add “revised” before “manuscript” in the second sentence. If applicable, one of the variations to this is to acknowledge a more-than-standard length of time for the first review process:

Thank you for your email. Your manuscript is currently under review. We apologize for the delay, which is due to difficulty obtaining reviews. When all reviews are received, the editors will make a decision, and you will be notified immediately.

Here is an example of a variation that I call a progression; I use it when I’ve already sent one of the above responses, and the review process is truly taking longer than anyone likes:
Thank you for your email. Your manuscript is currently under review. We apologize for the delay, which is due to difficulty obtaining reviews. We invited a number of reviewers who for various reasons, such as scheduling, travel, and other priorities, were unable to complete a review of your submission.

We now have one reviewer who has agreed to review the submission and have invited others, who have not yet responded.

We believe that time is of the essence in processing and reviewing manuscripts, and we are, of course, monitoring the progress of all manuscripts and following up with all reviewers according to our procedures.

When enough reviews are received for a decision to be made, the handling editor will make a decision, and you will be notified immediately. We do apologize for the delay in this case and would like to assure you that we are working toward sending you a decision as soon as possible.

The characters indicate an area that is always modified based on the circumstances; the sentence could even be deleted.

I have 12 stock phrases for author status inquiries; some are variations or progressions like the above, and some cover different circumstances (e.g., not yet sent for review, all reviews received).

Don’t like these stock phrases? Just make some that you do like and that are in line with your journal’s policies.

The Good Part: Dance Break!

Now that you’ve saved yourself some serious ticktock by using a stock phrase to respond to the 20 author status inquiries you received today, you have some time to get out of that chair and bless your body and mind with a little fun movement, including—you guessed it—the twist!

I became a licensed Zumba instructor in April 2015, and sometimes I call my class “Zumba for Office Workers.” In other words, I ain’t crazy. We don’t try to jump six feet in the air and six feet to the left and right. But, as I’m sure you know, we have to get off our booties and, well, shake them! So, let’s ease ourselves into this with an easy dance break.

Get out your vinyl, or look it up online, “Rockin’ Robin” by Bobby Day. No, not the one by Dora the Explorer or some other remake. Get the Bobby Day original song.

You can absolutely dance to this in any way you want. But we do three moves in my class: the Charleston, flap your arms like a bird, and the twist!

When the song starts, just do the Charleston. Tap to the front with one foot, bring it back, tap back with the other. You can fancify it if you want by swinging your legs in a half-arch, but you don’t have to. (Maybe let your hips warm up before you try that.) Whenever you want, switch legs so that the other foot taps forward.

When Bobby gets to the “Rockin’ Robin” part, pretend to hook your thumbs in imaginary suspenders and flap your elbows up and down. Next shift in the song, do the twist! You know you want to! Don’t hold back, and do the twist whatever way you like: big, little, keep your feet on the ground, or lift alternate feet. Repeat the three moves until the song is over. So much fun, right? Now... back to work!

Do you have a stock phrase that you want to share? Do you have a perfect song for a dance break? Email me at editorialofficenews@gmail.com.

Congratulations to Meaghan Kelly!

Meaghan is the Audience Choice winner of the ISMTE North American Conference poster competition. Look for her poster and an accompanying article on pages 12-14.
Three Keys to Performing an Operational Audit at Your Journal

By Danielle Padula
Community Development Manager
Scholastica

It’s not easy to optimize your academic journal’s peer-review process when you’re in the throes of daily editorial work. That’s why it is imperative for journals to set aside time to review key performance indicators, reflect on what is going well and what isn’t, and make plans for improvements. One of the best ways to do this is to run operational audits of your publication. Operational audits are holistic analyses of journal performance conducted at anywhere from monthly to yearly intervals.


The benefits of operational audits are clear, but knowing how to structure a successful audit isn’t always so obvious. Below are three key steps for performing an operational journal audit and best practices that we covered in our presentation.

Review Your Peer-Review Performance

The first step to performing an operational journal audit is reviewing how well your journal’s peer-review process is working and looking for problem areas, such as delayed time to decision. As you prepare to do this, keep one mantra in mind—let metrics be your guide. It’s so important for editors to dig into their data before making policy changes.

As noted by Jason Roberts, Senior Partner at Origin Editorial, in a Scholastica interview, “anecdote is the enemy of effective office management.” Roberts gave the example of a journal that believed its reviewer reminders were ineffective, only to check the data and see that review submissions spiked on reminder days.

Primary performance areas all journals should focus on and metrics for each are:

- Submission health: volume by article type (e.g., “research article”—total volume can be misleading), submission quality (accept/reject ratio), submission influx trends
- Reviewer performance: pending invitations, late reviews, and average days to completion
- Editor performance: assignment speed, decision ratios (variance across team), acceptance and rejection rate, time to decision, and time to publication (print and digital)

Use your data to assess editorial team productivity, your rate of accepted review assignments, and if you’re getting decisions to authors on time, among other key factors, in order to spot problem areas and address them.

In tracking journal data, keep in mind that automation and centralization are your friends. You don’t want to be bouncing between spreadsheets or separate report pages to make manual updates. Ideally, get a journal management system that will generate most of your data for you in one place. Also, be proactive about keeping your data clean. Dirty data will slow you down!

Some steps to prevent dirty data include:

- Checking for duplicate contacts in your database or inactive email addresses
- Establishing naming conventions for data (e.g., pick Revise and Resubmit or R&R)
- Importing new data into your system as needed

Of course, everything can’t always be assessed with data alone. If you have more qualitative questions like “how do authors and reviewers feel about working with my journal?”
plan ways to gather insights like sending annual author and reviewer surveys.

**Set Actionable Goals**

As you identify areas where your journal needs some work, don’t stop at statements like “we need more general article submissions.” Set specific and realistic goals that you can strive for like “we will increase our general article submission volume by 25% by improving our author experience and journal promotion.”

From there, brainstorm concrete steps your team will take to achieve your goals and data to track the success of each step. If you are looking for journal development inspiration, check out Scholastica’s Resources page for guides to optimizing peer review, improving reviewer management, and more. Be sure that someone on your team is accountable for each improvement step you decide to make.

If you work with a publisher, make sure they are also accountable for tasks they should handle. According to Kathey Alexander, consultant in professional and scholarly publishing, it is not uncommon for society journals to lose time managing processes their publishers are supposed to handle. “Often nobody ever sits down and says: here’s the journal’s process, here’s the duties of everyone involved,” she explained.

**Track Progress to Goals**

Finally, the last step in your operational audit should be tracking progress to your goals. To do this effectively, you will need:

- Metrics for every goal
- Historical data or industry standards to benchmark your progress
- Ability to easily reproduce metric reports, so you are comparing like data

It’s best to track the progress to your goals incrementally, regularly checking how each of your goal-based initiatives is working rather than waiting until your next journal audit to see how you did. That way, if a particular project isn’t going well, you will be able to change your tactics before your next audit meeting.

As you audit your journal processes, also consider whether you have the right tools to make lasting improvements. Ask questions like: Is our peer-review software creating unnecessary editorial steps? Is the learning curve for any of the technology we use hindering editor or reviewer performance? Is there a better way to store our data? You will likely find that there are areas of your peer-review process that don’t have to be so complex and can easily be fixed with the right tools.

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**Join an ISMTE Local Group Today!**

ISMTE Local Groups have formed through the efforts of members who would like to meet with peers and colleagues in their local area for networking and discussion. Participation is not limited to ISMTE members, and the only cost associated with participation will be your meal, if the group meets at a restaurant.

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Visit the ISMTE Local Groups page to join a local group or to find more information.
Strengthening the Reviewer Database by Improving User Profiles

By Meaghan Kelly
Managing Editor, Copy Editor
J&J Editorial, LLC

Editors’ Note: Meaghan Kelly was the Audience Choice winner of the ISMTE North American Conference poster competition. See her winning poster at the end of this article.

One of the many challenges faced by editors is finding qualified reviewers and pairing them with a manuscript within their area of expertise. This process can be time-consuming and is often where a manuscript gets held up in the submission process. When the Journal of Human Lactation (JHL) brought on a new editor-in-chief and associate editors, one of their main goals was to clean up the reviewer database and to improve the time it takes to secure the number of required reviewers. We believed the best approach to accomplishing this goal was to improve the basic user profile by adding more informational fields, which would then be added to the reviewer search options. Existing reviewers were prompted to update their profiles and also given the opportunity to resign as a reviewer for JHL. Over time, we saw a steady change in the reviewer response rate through these small yet impactful enhancements.

Background

JHL is a reputable title in its field. The journal publishes various article types, such as original research and insights into policies on breastfeeding and lactation, and usually receives about 300 submissions per year. Although the journal is small in submission size, the problems JHL faced are problems many journals experience regardless of the number of manuscripts they receive in a given year. JHL had an extremely large and outdated reviewer pool and struggled at times to find reviewers who were well-matched in expertise to the manuscript they were being asked to review.

JHL uses SAGE Track, a specialized version of the Scholar-One submission program. Before the new team of editors came on board in December 2015, the system was configured to give all authors reviewer rights. This caused an influx of users listed as reviewers who may not have been qualified or willing to perform as a reviewer, approximately 3,000 accounts. User profiles asked for basic contact information in addition to a selection of general keywords (e.g., breastfeeding, nutrition), which made searching for experienced reviewers difficult, especially when their contact information was out of date.

As the editors were handling a heavy backlog of manuscripts in addition to new submissions, they realized that the current processes were not ideal to move the journal in the direction they wanted. The editors and editorial staff decided to clean up the entire reviewer database, beginning with removing inactive accounts, revising keyword lists, and adding more detailed fields to the existing user profiles.

Methods

We first asked our support contact to reconfigure SAGE Track to provide new accounts with only author rights. We then ran reports on all users in the system with both author and reviewer rights and the dates they last reviewed. If that date was over two years ago, the reviewer role was given a hard end date and set as inactive. Reviewers who wanted to continue to review, but had not done so within two years, would need to email the editorial office, and the editor would decide if they were qualified to review. Their reviewer rights would then be returned.

Attention then turned to the existing list of keywords, which reviewers would select to best describe their areas of expertise. The editors thoroughly reviewed the keywords, removing those that were no longer relevant and adding additional words, particularly those found in the Medical Subject Headings database. The number of keywords required to be added to a reviewer profile was changed from one to five, and reviewers were allowed to select up to 13 terms.

After the keyword list was finalized, we worked together to decide which additional fields would be most beneficial to
the editors in selecting reviewers. It was important for the editors to know what specialized licenses reviewers held and if reviewers were certified as International Board Certified Lactation Consultants. Degree choices were expanded to include options such as Doctor of Science, Doctor of Education, Master of Public Health, and others relevant to the breastfeeding field.

Because the journal encourages authors from all over the world to submit their work, and manuscripts often reflect the breastfeeding practices of a specific culture, it was important for the editors to know which populations and geographic areas reviewers were specialized in or familiar with. For example, a population expertise may be listed as Aboriginal, and a geographic area of expertise could be listed as Middle East (Figure 1). The new profiles also asked reviewers to list their first language if it was not English along with any secondary languages the reviewer may be proficient in. These are all required fields the reviewer must fill out to complete the profile.

A broadcast email was then sent out to all reviewers in the system on December 1, 2016, instructing them to update their account by January 1, 2017. If the reviewers failed to update by that date, they were removed from the system. The email contained instructions on how to locate the user accounts, what the editor expected of the reviewers, and a copy of the reviewer scoresheet, which was also revised at this time. Reviewers were given the opportunity to retire if they felt they could not meet the expected responsibilities or no longer had the time to review. This would ensure that only dedicated reviewers would remain in the system.

The additional fields were then pulled into the reviewer advanced search option, which allowed the editors to select reviewers based on specific attributes that directly related to the manuscript (Figure 2). The selection criteria for each manuscript are relatively meticulous. For each manuscript, there needs to be at least one reviewer who has a PhD, one international reviewer (when appropriate), and no more than one clinician; three reviewers are needed to make a decision. Having this detailed information readily available to editors and editorial staff eases the stress of finding qualified reviewers while making the overall process of selection and inviting more efficient.

ScholarOne Cognos reports were run throughout the process to track the number of updated accounts and to create a list of reviewers whose reviewer role could be expired. For January to June in the years 2013 to 2017, a report was run to record the number of days between (1) the date the first reviewer invitation was sent out and the date of the first “agree” response and (2) the date of the first “agree” response and the date the first review was completed, thereby monitoring change in reviewer behavior over time.

Figure 1. Example of new informational fields added to user accounts.

Figure 2. Example of the advanced reviewer search option that now includes the new informational fields.

Figure 3. Change in reviewer performance over time, 2013 to 2017.
Results
As of June 26, 2017, there were 2,632 updated reviewer accounts in the system. The average time between first invitation sent to first agree response in 2017 decreased by 0.68 days (from 3.31 days in 2016 to 2.63 days), while the time from first agree response to first completed review increased 1.43 days (from 11.42 days in 2016 to 12.85 days) (Figure 3). There was a considerable change in response time between 2015 and 2016, with a decrease of 1.01 days between first invitation sent and first agree response and a decrease of 4.98 days between first agree response and first completed review.

Conclusions
Although the response time did decrease after the reviewers were prompted to update their accounts, the decrease is not considerable enough to claim that the cause of the decline is because of the procedural change. The response time is still acceptable and the reviews are still being returned within the two weeks given to perform a review. We hope that with the continued monitoring of updated accounts and removal of reviewer rights, the existing reviewer pool will be improved and the editors of JHL will be able to select more well-matched and qualified reviewers.
Don’t People Know About Linkage? Toll-Free Links Should Be a Win for Everybody

By Todd Reitzel

The recent controversy over the American Psychological Association’s Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedown notices reminds us about the tensions to be negotiated between author interests and publisher interests. Authors are generally interested in getting their content out into the research community and ensuring that their content is accessible. Publishers are generally interested in getting out content that’s useful to the research community and ensuring that their investment in the content reaps value that sustains the endeavor.

Over the past few years, many dimensions of cooperation between authors and publishers have emerged, including offering exclusive licenses to publish and Creative Commons licenses as an alternative to copyright assignments and allowing article postings on personal sites, on university sites, and in university repositories. These practices are allowed by many publishers, and some authors may practice these whether the publisher allows it or not. Many publishers also help authors fulfill grant funding requirements (e.g., the National Institutes of Health deposit requirement to PubMed Central) by making the article deposit for the authors or participating in CHORUS (www.chorusaccess.org) to help authors comply with public funding requirements. The pressure on researchers to publish is well known. And research faculty are under pressure to acquire research grant funding; frequently their university positions depend on it. The livelihoods of untenured faculty increasingly depend on their ability to attract grant money and convert that into published research. Funding agencies increasingly expect to see results and, in many cases, expect public access to published research reports.

There are also many pressures on journals and their business models. Some libraries, due to lower budgets, are cancelling some journal subscriptions. Requirements to deposit articles in repositories, whether from universities or funding agencies, continue to accumulate. And scholarly sharing networks, whether legal or not, continue to cut into the business model that supports many journals: One study found that 85% of all published articles in subscription journals may now be found on Sci-Hub. New tools are also emerging to help readers find free versions of articles behind paywalls. Clearly, many universities, researchers, and funders continue to chafe at certain aspects of current publishing business models, despite the aforementioned changes in practices.

Toll-Free Links

One longstanding tool of cooperation between authors and publishers is an underutilized one: the toll-free link. Toll-free links lead to the version of record on a journal’s publishing site and constitute an all-around win that serves both author interests and publisher interests.

Toll-free links work by giving full-text access to a given article to anyone who clicks on it. If a publisher provides a toll-free link for an article to its author, the author can place that link on her or his website or online CV, in the author’s institutional repository, or even in a third-party repository. The link leads to the version of record on the publisher’s site, giving full-text access to a specific article without giving access to the rest of the journal. An expiration date may be put on a toll-free link, if the publisher chooses. Some systems can customize a link to work only when placed on a certain site (e.g., the author’s CV), again only if the publisher chooses.

Author and Publisher Interests

A toll-free link serves an author’s interests because it provides immediate access to her or his content to anyone in the community. Because the access is to the version of record, it
reminds the community that the article has been validated through peer review.

A toll-free link also serves a publisher’s interests because it brings the community to an article’s version of record, where the publisher logs the online usage. Healthy online usage is one key indicator for demonstrating content value, and for most publishers it is a top priority.

Content usage through toll-free links may not get included in librarians’ usage reports that help them decide whether subscribing to a given journal is a good purchase. Even so, bringing the community to content under a journal’s or publisher’s branding can serve as a loss leader, a sample of what the journal and publisher offer, and may lead to increased demand for content under that brand. So a toll-free link can be a marketing tool for a journal.

So why aren’t toll-free links used more extensively? They are available on many major publishing platforms, including HighWire Press, Atypon, and Silverchair, as well as on some independent publishing platforms such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), which has nicely branded its link service as the ACM Author-Izer. Some major platforms, however, do not offer toll-free links, and some major publishers don’t take advantage of their platform’s ability to generate the links. Elsevier does offer its authors Share Links, which can be shared with anyone and which work for 50 days. Alternatively, Wiley and Springer Nature have begun offering PDF views through ReadCube (www.readcube.com), but those don’t allow printing or saving, whereas toll-free links typically allow full use of features.

**Toll-Free Links in Use**

Two associations I’ve worked for, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Association for Psychological Science (APS), offer a toll-free link to any author who requests one. Those organizations also use the links to lead users from their association websites to key research content in their journals.

For example, AERA gives anyone visiting its website free access to content in its flagship journal, *Educational Researcher*, via toll-free links. Several years ago, AERA made the strategic decision to replace freely accessible PDFs of the journal posted on the AERA website with the toll-free links leading to the version of record at SAGE Publications. Not only did this change bring readers to *Educational Researcher’s* content under its journal branding, but it also allowed the publisher to record and count the online usage, which was a point of emphasis for AERA since its journals first went online only in 2007.

AERA has also made available free access to Profiles in Research, a series of interviews with researchers who have advanced the field of education and behavioral statistics. The interviews were published starting in 2003 in AERA’s *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics* but were deemed of sufficient importance by AERA to make them freely accessible via toll-free links, again increasing the recorded online usage of this journal important to education researchers.

APS is another association publishing its journals with SAGE and using toll-free links strategically. Its journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest (PSPI)* is designed to offer research to policy makers, and through the APS website readers can access all past articles of *PSPI*. Not only does this make the APS website a resource for policy makers and others interested in public policy, but it again drives readership numbers on the SAGE *PSPI* site.

Another APS priority is supporting and enhancing the education of psychological science, and the APS Fund for Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science provides small grants to enhance teaching in the discipline. One project funded by APS, the Trinity University Open Stats Lab, seeks to teach statistics by using open data from the APS flagship journal, *Psychological Science*. Because the Open Stats Lab needed to ensure access to the relevant journal articles, APS agreed to provide access to them via toll-free links.

**Challenges**

There can be some administrative challenges with toll-free links. For example, when a journal moves to a different platform, links must be regenerated and redistributed to their original recipients. But content management systems can help publishers manage their toll-free links, and thus create new replacement ones. When SAGE moved the AERA and APS journals to a new platform at the end of 2016, SAGE used its toll-free link records as the basis for generating links on the new platform.

Another issue could be piracy. Could toll-free links be harvested to set up a competing site that pirates access to a given journal? It’s possible. But toll-free links can be programmed to work only from a specified domain. The toll-free links to *Educational Researcher* content only work from the AERA domain aera.net.

And it can be perilous to give away too much content for free. Does providing free content create unsustainable expectations among readers? Compared with the amount of article sharing on networks such as Sci-Hub,
Libgen, and others, combined with takedown orders from publishers, isn’t it better to put effort into something that benefits both authors and publishers instead of something that creates tensions?

This article is an expansion of a post published on The Scholarly Kitchen blog.¹⁸

References

Recap on CSE’s Peer Review Week Webinar: *Tools of the Trade for Transparency: How Journals Can Increase Transparency in the Peer-Review Process*

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With the theme of this year’s Peer Review Week focusing on the transparency of the peer-review process, The Council of Science Editors (CSE) hosted a webinar with presentations from four knowledgeable professionals about their experiences increasing transparency in their own journals and societies. They offered four very different presentations based around this topic, all providing insight into diverse ways transparency can be adapted into the peer-review process. The importance of increasing transparency in the process for scholarly publishing was stressed throughout, but the four speakers shared different tools and processes they have used to get there.

Bernd Pulverer, Chief Editor of *The EMBO Journal* started off the webinar by discussing incentives for peer reviewers. Giving reviewers credits for reviewing for a journal creates higher motivation to volunteer and complete reviews. There are other ways to encourage reviewers, including the option to publish decision letters, reviews, and rebuttals. This also, in turn, creates transparency and allows the process and the information to be available to the public. One interesting thing that Pulverer presented was *EMBO Journal’s* use of an open discussion between the reviewers anonymously. This allows the reviewers the ability to converse with each other about the submitted article and bounce ideas off each other in a nameless environment, which helps balance the need for transparency with protecting reviewers’ identities so they feel empowered to share their opinions freely.

Transparency in publishing was highlighted by John Pham. He clarified the importance of transparency, mentioning the decrease in corruption, discrimination, and bias, and reduction of individual and public risk. To this end, he began by highlighting some of the ways transparency intersects with our everyday lives, like using food labels and talking about how the goals we set out for transparency are important to continually check in on and make sure our efforts are all working toward achieving those goals. He touched on how benefits and incentives to provide disclosures is an important way to encourage and create transparency within the review process, and providing the information needed up front also helps prepare the reviewers to provide the information needed. Double/triple blinded reviews are one way to reduce conflicts of interest, bias, corruption, and cronyism, if the journal/society is willing to go this route.
Pham also discussed the potential caveats of transparency issues, which was eye opening and informative. Even if the authors/reviewers provide disclosed information, it may be incomplete and could cause misunderstandings or false impressions. There is also a chance that advice and comments may not be completely honest or candid if their identities will be made known during or after the process. In Pham’s estimation, this is all part of why when journals are trying to increase transparency in the peer-review process, or in any process, they need to continually check that their results are aligning with their goals and be ready to adjust those efforts if they are falling short of the goals they have set.

The next presentation, by Adrian Aldcroft, focused on open peer review. He stressed the importance of reviews that evaluated the scientific work and the quality of the work but keeping that balance between both transparency and integrity, something Pulverer also brought into focus. This is especially true in the medical field where a possible conflict that reviewers could have is competing interests. Implementing a competing interest statement is one way he mentioned for managing this issue and continuing to balance the need for transparency with protecting the peer-review process. Open peer review in some form is one way, as highlighted by Aldcroft, that journals can increase transparency in the entire review process.

The webinar was concluded with a presentation on Publons by Jan Higgins. Publons is a systematic way to reward reviewers with credit across multiple publishers, while keeping them anonymous. This makes it easy for editors and editorial staff to identify credible reviewers and near impossible for the authors to unmask the information. There are multiple perks of this system, including a straightforward implementation process for the editorial office, and the ease of recognizing reviewers, with essentially no added burden on staff in ongoing use of Publons. In addition, Higgins spoke about the options Publons offers to journals. Journals and publishers can choose various levels of what information they share, from just the basics (for instance, just that someone reviewed for a specific journal) to more advanced information (for instance, the paper they reviewed), so that journals with concerns about their blinding process can set their information transparency at a level with which they are comfortable.

Overall, this webinar offered a deep information pool for editors and editorial staff in the scholarly publishing industry, especially about how to increase the transparency of their own peer-review process. Many of these processes can be directly implemented into other journal workflows in some form, and they can often help provide better transparency in the peer-review process. It is important to remember that every journal is different but that we should all be making strides to better the peer-review process, and increasing transparency is a great direction to move in as long as we do it with clear goals in mind that align with our own specific journal’s needs.

**ISMTE Upcoming Conferences**

**10th Annual European Conference**

Copthorne Tara Hotel London Kensington

9-10 November 2017
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Calendar of Events

Medical Writing & Communication Conference
November 1-4, 2017
Orlando, Florida, USA
http://www.amwa.org/

45th EMWA Conference
November 2-4, 2017
Cascais, Portugal
http://www.emwa.org/

Medical Editors Short Course
November 8-10, 2017
Oxford, United Kingdom
https://www.pspconsulting.org/medical-editors/

ISMTE European Conference
November 9-10, 2017
London, England
www.ismte.org
EASE members receive ISMTE member registration rate

ISMTE Asian-Pacific Conference
March 27-28, 2018
Singapore
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