

A Practical Commentary on Journal Credibility, Predatory Risk, and How to Pick the Right Journal for Emerging Scholars

Darrell Norman Burrell 

*Marymount University, Arlington, VA, USA
College of Integrative Medicine & Health Sciences, Saybrook University, USA
Georgetown University- Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics USA
dburrell@marymount.edu*

Abstract: Academic publishing can extend a doctoral researcher's contribution, strengthen applications for adjunct and full-time faculty work, and demonstrate the ability to participate in disciplinary debate. Those benefits depend partly on where the work appears. This commentary offers a practical method for selecting credible and attainable journals without confusing legitimacy with prestige. It explains why deceptive or grossly deficient publishing practices create risks for authors, readers, institutions, and the scholarly record; interprets lessons from prominent editorial stings, paper withdrawals, and regulatory enforcement; and translates those lessons into a repeatable review of journal identity, scope, editorial governance, peer review, fees, indexing, sample articles, and publication ethics. It also positions Beall-related warnings and the Australian Business Deans Council journal list as contextual data points rather than final verdicts. Practical scenarios show how an author can respond to unsolicited invitations, compare lower-tier but credible outlets, and evaluate the cumulative career effects of having no publications or a record concentrated in questionable venues. The central recommendation is a documented, evidence-based decision process that values audience fit, transparent quality control, and long-term scholarly credibility over speed, flattery, or publication count.

Keywords: Journal Selection, Predatory Journals, Scholarly Publishing, Doctoral Education, Academic Careers, Peer Review

Overview

Publication is not merely the final location of a manuscript; it is part of the argument an author makes about the work's readiness for scholarly use. Journal choice affects who can discover the article, what kind of review readers reasonably infer, and how hiring or promotion committees interpret the author's judgment. Research on outlet selection shows that authors weigh fit, audience, reputation, access, timing, and career incentives rather than a single universal measure of quality (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Rowley et al., 2022; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). The practical implication is that authors should seek credible alignment, not automatic admission to the most prestigious title. This commentary therefore treats journal selection as a professional due diligence process that can be learned, documented, and improved.

Problem Statement

Students, emerging scholars, and even experienced academics can enter the publication process without an adequate understanding of how journals differ in purpose, editorial governance, peer review, indexing, access, fees, rights, audience, and institutional recognition. Doctoral programs often teach research design and dissertation completion more explicitly than they teach the publishing marketplace, leaving novice authors to infer unfamiliar rules from faculty advice, journal websites, unsolicited invitations, and the practices of peers. Studies of journal selection indicate that researchers must balance numerous considerations, including fit, reputation, readership, access, review time, and career value, yet these criteria can be difficult to interpret without guided experience (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Rowley et al., 2022; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). This knowledge gap increases the likelihood that an author will either trust misleading claims or

reject a credible opportunity because the venue is unfamiliar. The underlying problem is therefore not merely a shortage of journal names, but a shortage of transparent decision-making knowledge.

The problem is intensified when novice researchers are told that worthwhile scholarship must appear only in the top journals of their discipline. Highly selective journals can provide substantial visibility and recognition, but they also receive more publishable manuscripts than they can accept and may favor particular topics, methods, networks, or forms of contribution. Research concerning journal rankings and inclusion fairness suggests that prestige hierarchies do not measure every dimension of quality equally and may reproduce uneven representation across authors and intellectual traditions (Grossmann et al., 2019; Zainuba & Rahal, 2015). For a novice researcher who is still developing a scholarly voice, interpreting peer review reports, and learning how to frame a contribution for a specialized audience, an exclusive top-journal mandate can convert a developmental process into a repeated experience of delay and rejection. The consequence may be unnecessary discouragement, stalled career progress, strategic mismatch, or increased susceptibility to a questionable journal that promises the recognition and speed that elite outlets withhold.

A prestige-only message also creates a false choice between elite publication and low-quality publication. Credible specialist, regional, applied, interdisciplinary, practitioner-oriented, and emerging journals can provide rigorous review and meaningful readership even when they carry modest rankings or citation measures. Comprehensive outlet-selection models treat journal quality as one consideration within a larger relationship among manuscript fit, intended audience, editorial process, discoverability, cost, and professional purpose (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). When scholars are not taught this broader framework, they may confuse lower status with illegitimacy or interpret any rapid and flattering invitation as a welcome alternative to an inaccessible elite system. Addressing the problem requires a method that protects standards without treating prestige as the only credible form of scholarly value.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this commentary is to provide students, emerging scholars, doctoral graduates, and other academics with an analytical and practical framework for selecting credible publication venues across different levels of disciplinary prestige. Drawing on research about journal selection, predatory publishing, editorial failures, information asymmetry, and ranking limitations, the paper explains how authors can distinguish attainable legitimacy from deceptive accessibility and how they can evaluate the consequences of a venue decision for their careers, collaborators, readers, and the scholarly record (Bagues et al., 2019; Cobey et al., 2018; Elmore & Weston, 2020). The commentary uses historical cases, critical questions, practical examples, a decision-flow figure, and a due diligence checklist to translate abstract concerns into actions that can be documented before submission. Its aim is not to identify one universally correct journal or to discourage aspirational submissions, but to strengthen the author's capacity to compare evidence, recognize tradeoffs, question prestige-based assumptions, and make proportionate judgments. The sections that follow connect this purpose to academic career development, journal legitimacy, historical oversight failures, and a repeatable selection process.

Why Publishing Matters Across the Academic Career

Credible publication can convert doctoral training into evidence that a scholar can communicate beyond the dissertation committee (Burrell & Richardson, 2023). A dissertation proves the capacity to sustain a major research project, whereas a journal article requires adaptation to a defined readership, compliance with disciplinary conventions, and response to external criticism. Journal-selection models accordingly emphasize that authors must align the manuscript's subject, method, article type, and intended audience with an outlet's actual content (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). For a doctoral student, the publishing process demonstrates emerging

independence rather than the mere possession of a completed degree (Burrell, 2024). Publication strategy should therefore begin with the contribution and audience the researcher wants to make visible.

Publications can matter even when a faculty advertisement does not state a numerical requirement. Adjunct appointments often emphasize graduate credentials, subject expertise, and teaching effectiveness, but online searches may attract large pools of similarly qualified candidates. In that setting, a credible article can provide an additional signal of current disciplinary engagement and readiness to teach research-intensive material. Authors' outlet decisions are shaped partly by reputational and career considerations, which helps explain why venue quality becomes consequential during evaluation (Rowley et al., 2022). A candidate should not assume that publication replaces teaching evidence, but should recognize that it can differentiate an otherwise comparable application (Burrell, 2024).

The consequences become sharper when an applicant has no publications or has published only in questionable venues. Information asymmetry allows evaluators to use journal names and apparent productivity as shortcuts, yet those signals can mislead when editorial standards are weak or difficult to verify (Bagues et al., 2019). A candidate with no articles may be excluded from research-oriented or highly competitive faculty opportunities, while a candidate with many dubious publications may invite questions about peer review, judgment, and integrity. The problem is cumulative rather than automatic, because one mistaken choice does not prove misconduct and one credible article does not guarantee a job. A sustainable career strategy builds a small, coherent body of verifiable scholarship instead of optimizing either speed or volume.

Legitimacy Is Not the Same as Prestige

A lower-tier journal can be a sound scholarly home when it operates transparently and reaches the appropriate readers. Specialist, regional, applied, teaching-focused, and emerging journals may have modest citation metrics while still providing real peer review, stable archives, clear fees, and responsible editorial governance. Comprehensive selection frameworks place topical fit, readership, review process, discoverability, timing, and practical requirements alongside reputation (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). Treating every less-selective title as suspect confuses status hierarchy with minimum scholarly integrity. Authors should evaluate whether a venue does its stated work honestly, not whether it occupies the highest rung of a ranking.

The term predatory journal should likewise be used with precision rather than as a casual insult. A scoping review found substantial variation in how the concept had been defined, while recurring concerns involved deception, poor transparency, deficient editorial practices, and aggressive profit-seeking that disregards scholarly standards (Cobey et al., 2018). Practical reviews also describe combinations of misleading metrics, implausible review promises, hidden charges, copied websites, and unverifiable boards as reasons for heightened scrutiny (Elmore & Weston, 2020; Richtig et al., 2018). A typographical error or low citation count alone cannot establish predation, because legitimate small journals can have limited resources. The defensible conclusion comes from a pattern of independently checked evidence.

Critical judgment requires attention to both false negatives and false positives. A false negative occurs when an author mistakes a deceptive venue for a legitimate one and transfers money, rights, data, or reputation into a process that offers little scholarly scrutiny. A false positive occurs when an evaluator dismisses a credible but unfamiliar, regional, multilingual, open-access, or lower-ranked journal merely because it lacks elite recognition. Cobey et al. (2018) show why definitional uncertainty makes both errors possible, while Grossmann et al. (2019) demonstrate that established quality hierarchies can raise questions of inclusion

fairness. A responsible framework must therefore be skeptical of unsupported claims and skeptical of unsupported stigma at the same time.

Author fees also require analysis rather than reflexive condemnation. A publication charge can support legitimate editorial, preservation, and access functions, while a subscription journal can still have poor oversight; the ethical problem arises when charges are hidden, coercive, disconnected from services, or revealed only after acceptance. The FTC's OMICS case illustrates the seriousness of misleading fee and service representations (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). Authors should ask what the fee purchases, when it becomes binding, whether waivers exist, what happens after withdrawal, and whether payment is separated from editorial judgment. Transparent business terms are a component of legitimacy, not a substitute for scholarly quality.

The Incentive Problem Behind Questionable Publishing

Questionable publishing persists partly because academic evaluation can reward visible output before it evaluates the process that produced it. When committees face many applicants, publication counts, journal labels, and citation totals become efficient proxies for labor-intensive article assessment. Bagues et al. (2019) analyze how information asymmetries can allow questionable publications to influence scientific evaluation, and Demir (2018) examines who publishes in such outlets and why. These dynamics mean that responsibility cannot be assigned only to individual authors, because institutions also shape behavior through ambiguous expectations and volume-based incentives. Better judgment requires candidates to resist short-term rewards and institutions to clarify what evidence of quality they actually value.

Time pressure can narrow an author's reasoning precisely when broader analysis is most needed. A graduating student may believe that any acceptance before a job deadline is better than no publication, while an adjunct may view a promised seven-day review as a rare chance to remain competitive. Rowley et al. (2022) show that timing, reputation, access, and other practical factors influence journal decisions, but those factors do not carry equal long-term risk. A fast questionable publication can become permanently visible on a curriculum vitae, while a slower credible review can improve both the paper and the author's research habits. The strategic question is not simply how quickly an article can appear, but what inference the venue will support years later.

Unequal access to mentoring further complicates responsibility. Scholars working outside research-intensive institutions may lack subscription databases, experienced coauthors, publication workshops, or colleagues familiar with specific journals, making polished solicitations more persuasive. Beall (2016) and Elmore and Weston (2020) emphasize vigilance, but warnings are most useful when paired with teachable verification practices rather than shame after an error. Senior scholars, doctoral programs, libraries, and hiring committees should make tacit publication norms explicit and distinguish deliberate deception from an early-career mistake. This shared-responsibility perspective creates better prevention without weakening standards.

What Historical Investigations Reveal

Editorial claims deserve verification because a statement that a journal uses peer review does not prove that meaningful review occurred. Bohannon (2013) submitted a deliberately flawed manuscript to open-access journals and reported widespread acceptance despite serious scientific defects. The exercise did not test every journal or show that open access itself causes weak review, but it demonstrated how easily the language of quality control can become performative. An author who accepts a rapid guarantee of publication may therefore be purchasing the appearance of validation rather than receiving expert criticism. A credible choice requires evidence that the review process can challenge and improve a paper.

A prestigious-looking editorial board also has value only when its members are real, qualified, and knowingly involved. Burdick (2017) described an investigation in which a fictitious and unqualified scholar, Anna O. Szust, received editorial offers from numerous journals after applying with fabricated credentials. The episode exposed how a board can function as decoration when a publisher does not verify identity or expertise. Authors should independently confirm a small sample of editors through institutional profiles and publication records rather than relying on portraits or impressive affiliations displayed on the journal site. Governance becomes credible when the people named by the journal can also be connected to it from outside the journal's own claims.

Quality-control failures are not limited to unfamiliar publishers, which is why recognizable branding cannot end an inquiry. Van Noorden (2014) reported the withdrawal of more than 120 computer-generated papers from conference proceedings associated with major publishing organizations. The nonsensical articles revealed breakdowns in editorial screening and review despite the presence of known imprints. This case complicates any simple division between safe brands and unsafe outsiders. Authors should inspect the journal's current articles and processes even when the publisher is familiar.

Some publishing misconduct has also crossed from weak practice into legally actionable deception. The Federal Trade Commission (2019) reported a federal judgment exceeding \$50.1 million against OMICS-related defendants for deceptive representations involving peer review, editorial boards, impact factors, conferences, and publishing fees. The enforcement action shows why incomplete fee disclosure and false external validation are not minor administrative problems. They affect an author's ability to give informed consent and can misrepresent the article to later readers. A journal's business terms should therefore be reviewed with the same seriousness as its scholarly scope.

A Practical Due Diligence Method

Due diligence should function as triangulation, which means that important claims are checked through sources with different incentives. A journal website is useful for learning what the publisher asserts, but it is not independent evidence of its own indexing, board participation, or metric. External databases, institutional profiles, sample articles, archived issue histories, and informed disciplinary consultation can confirm or contradict those assertions. Elmore and Weston (2020) and Suiter and Sarli (2019) recommend examining multiple criteria because a single indicator can be incomplete or manipulated. The objective is not certainty beyond all doubt, but a proportionate decision based on converging evidence.

Begin With the Manuscript and Its Readers

Effective screening begins before an author opens a journal website. The author should identify the paper's central contribution, research design, disciplinary conversation, geographic reach, article type, and most useful readership. Selection scholarship consistently treats manuscript-journal fit as multidimensional, not as a contest for the highest available metric (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Rowley et al., 2022). For example, a rigorous study of online adjunct mentoring may have greater influence in a credible teaching-and-learning journal than in a broadly ranked management journal that rarely publishes educational research. Defining the intended readers makes later evidence about scope and impact easier to interpret.

Verify Identity Before Reputation

A journal must first be shown to be the journal it claims to be. The exact title, ISSN, publisher, web domain, physical or organizational contact information, volume history, and DOI patterns should agree across independent records. Guidance on avoiding questionable journals emphasizes that misleading titles and imitation websites can exploit authors who recognize a respected name

but do not check identifiers (Beall, 2016; Elmore & Weston, 2020). An invitation that omits a website, sample article, indexing record, and fee policy is not proof of fraud, but it withholds the information needed for an informed submission. The appropriate response is to pause and locate the journal independently rather than send a manuscript as an email attachment.

Confirm Indexing in the Index Itself

Indexing should be treated as a verifiable coverage relationship, not a logo on a webpage. An author should search the relevant database by exact title and ISSN, confirm the publisher, examine active or discontinued status, and note the years and content types covered. Google Scholar can help test discoverability by locating articles from the journal, but search results alone do not establish selective inclusion, current coverage, or editorial quality. Suiter and Sarli (2019) place indexing and audience reach among several journal-selection criteria, which means discovery evidence should be interpreted with fit and quality-control evidence. The author's record should state what was checked, where it was checked, and when.

Google Scholar results demand especially careful interpretation because discoverability and endorsement are different propositions. Finding articles from a journal can demonstrate that its content is visible to the search system, yet it does not prove that the title passed the curatorial standards of a selective disciplinary index. Conversely, a credible new or local journal may have uneven search visibility without being deceptive. The critical comparison is whether the journal's precise claim, such as being covered by a named database during stated years, matches the database's own record (Suiter & Sarli, 2019). Authors should therefore report Scholar as one discovery check and avoid converting it into a universal legitimacy test.

Read Sample Articles as Evidence

Recent articles provide the clearest view of what a journal actually publishes. Authors should read at least three papers from different issues and examine the coherence of the argument, appropriateness of the method, citation accuracy, consistency of reference formatting, quality of tables or figures, ethics and conflict disclosures, and signs of substantive editing. Reviews of predatory publishing warn that weak oversight can allow poor or incoherent scholarship to acquire the visual form of a journal article (Mathew & Patel, 2022; Richtig et al., 2018). As a practical example, a polished abstract should not outweigh references that do not support the claims, a method that cannot answer the research question, or citations formatted so inconsistently that sources cannot be traced. Sample-article review connects the journal's promises to observable editorial outcomes.

Sample review should also distinguish disagreement from deficiency. An author may reject a paper's theoretical position yet still observe a clear research question, appropriate evidence, acknowledgment of limitations, accurate citations, and transparent reasoning. By contrast, repeated causal claims from descriptive data, implausible statistics, irrelevant references, missing ethics information, or passages unrelated to the topic indicate failures that stylistic polish cannot repair. The withdrawal of computer-generated papers reported by Van Noorden (2014) shows why surface formatting is insufficient evidence of intellectual quality. The reviewer should ask whether the article makes its reasoning inspectable, not whether it reaches a preferred conclusion.

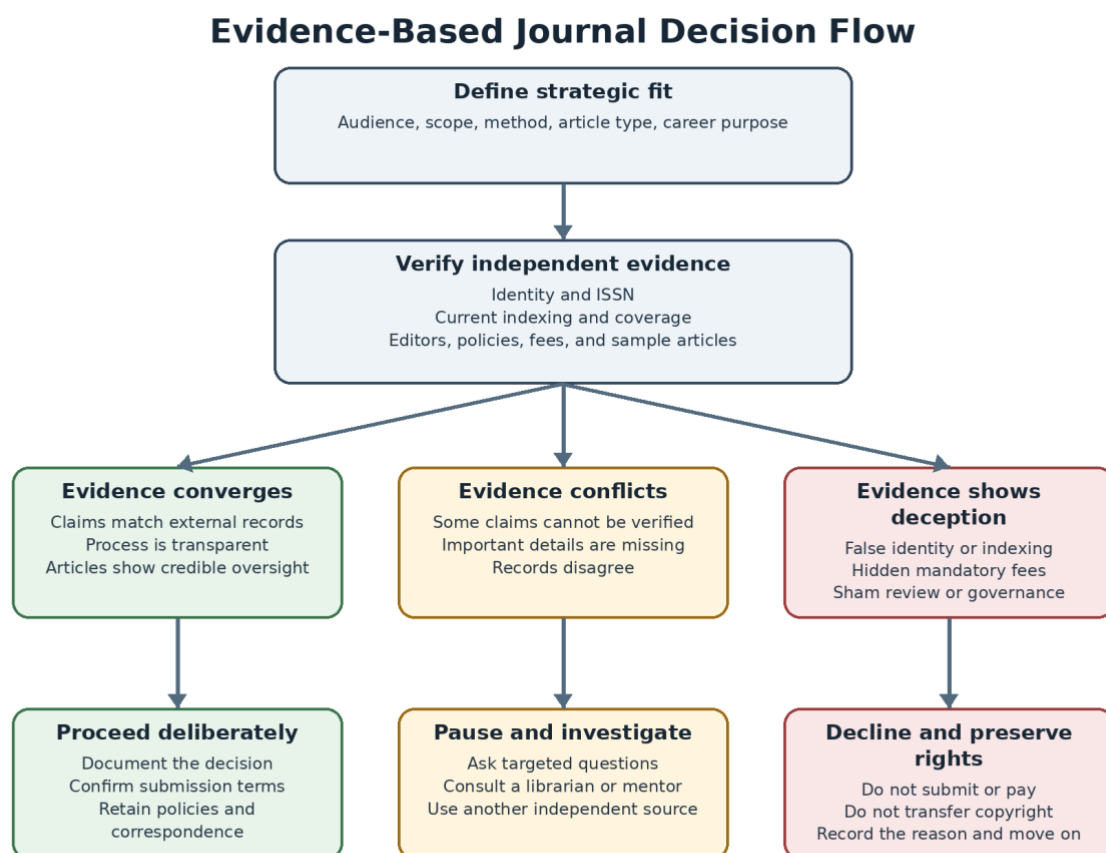
Examine Review, Governance, Fees, and Ethics Together

A credible process is transparent enough for an author to understand what will happen after submission. The journal should identify its review model, conflicts policy, expected timeline, decision authority, correction and retraction procedures, copyright terms, and all mandatory charges before the manuscript is committed. Richtig et al. (2018) and Elmore and Weston (2020) describe opacity, implausible speed, and misleading editorial or metric claims as recurring

concerns. A two-week review is not impossible in every field, but a guaranteed acceptance within days is inconsistent with genuine independent scrutiny. The combined process should make rejection and revision credible possibilities, not obstacles that disappear after payment.

The quality of a rejection process can be as revealing as the promise of acceptance. Legitimate journals may desk-reject quickly because of scope or basic quality, but they should not demand a withdrawal payment, threaten an author, or obstruct the return of rights when no publication agreement justifies doing so. Bohannon's (2013) sting demonstrates the danger of editorial systems that rarely use rejection to enforce scientific standards. Before submitting, an author should know how withdrawal, appeals, complaints, and corrections are handled and should save a dated copy of those policies. A venue that cannot explain how it says no may not be equipped to make acceptance meaningful.

Figure 1 presents the decision logic as a sequence of fit, verification, and proportional response. The figure emphasizes that conflicting evidence should produce a pause rather than an automatic accusation, while documented deception should lead the author to preserve rights and decline. This approach operationalizes the multi-criteria reasoning recommended in journal-selection guidance (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). It also reduces the influence of urgency by identifying the next action before an invitation arrives. The visual should be read as a reasoning aid, not as an algorithm that eliminates contextual judgment.



A ranking, logo, invitation, or single warning sign should not bypass this sequence.

Figure 1. Evidence-Based Journal Decision Flow

Use Lists as Data Points, Not Verdicts

Beall's work can serve as a historical warning source, but it should not substitute for current investigation. Beall (2016) urged authors to scrutinize publishing practices during a period of rapid growth in deceptive solicitations and author-pays venues. Historical inclusion can direct attention to a publisher's past conduct, yet a static list cannot capture every ownership change, improvement, decline, or new title. Absence also cannot prove legitimacy, and inclusion does not establish that every article or author associated with the venue is fraudulent. The list is most useful when it generates specific questions that are answered with present evidence.

The Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) quality journals list can add disciplinary context for business-related, public policy, healthcare administration, social science, technology management, and technology management research, but ranking categories are not synonyms for legitimacy. Grossmann et al. (2019) examined inclusion fairness in A-star business publications, illustrating that ranking systems can reproduce uneven representation and should be interpreted critically. Zainuba and Rahal (2015) likewise questioned the validity of business and management ranking lists and argued for broader approaches to determining journal quality. A lower-listed but transparent specialist journal may be more suitable than a highly ranked journal whose audience and methods do not fit the manuscript. ABDC information should therefore be combined with sample quality, audience, indexing, review, fees, ethics, and the author's institutional context.

Rankings can alter research behavior even when they are intended only to summarize quality. If promotion systems assign disproportionate value to a narrow category, researchers may avoid local problems, replication, interdisciplinary work, practitioner audiences, or methods that those journals seldom publish. Grossmann et al. (2019) raise fairness concerns within elite business outlets, while Zainuba and Rahal (2015) question whether ranking lists adequately capture journal quality. The consequence is not only personal exclusion; it can narrow the questions that receive scholarly attention. Authors should understand ranking incentives without allowing them to determine the intellectual purpose of every project.

A Comparative Decision Example

Consider a doctoral graduate choosing among three plausible outlets. Journal A has the strongest ranking but rarely publishes a manuscript using a qualitative method, Journal B is a credible lower-tier specialist journal with transparent review and readers who use the topic, and Journal C promises publication in ten days but offers no verifiable indexing or fee schedule. Selection models suggest that fit, audience, process, and practical conditions should be weighed together (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Rowley et al., 2022). Journal B may offer the strongest strategic value because its attainable status does not compromise legitimacy and its readership increases the probability of meaningful use. The example demonstrates that a rational choice can reject both status maximization and speed maximization.

The same comparison changes when the author's purpose changes, which is why no static ranking can make the decision. A paper intended to influence local teaching practice may benefit from practitioner access, while a paper intended to establish a theoretical research trajectory may require a different disciplinary audience. Suiter and Sarli (2019) emphasize criteria that include audience and indexing, and Rowley et al. (2022) show that researchers balance multiple considerations in actual decisions. The author should therefore state the purpose before assigning weight to each criterion. Explicit weighting makes tradeoffs visible and prevents prestige from becoming an unexamined default.

Responding to Unsolicited Invitations

An unsolicited invitation should be treated as a lead to investigate, not as evidence of recognition. Questionable publishers often exploit urgency, flattery, broad subject claims, and promises of unusually fast publication, while demographic and incentive research shows that authors may be

drawn by access, pressure, or limited information rather than by simple carelessness (Demir, 2018). Consider a doctoral graduate who receives praise for an unrelated conference abstract and a request to submit within five days, but no website or fee schedule. The prudent response is to avoid the embedded links, search for the journal independently, verify its identity and articles, and decline if key evidence remains unavailable. Professional judgment begins where the flattering email ends.

A decision memo can convert caution into a repeatable practice. The author can record the manuscript's fit, three sample articles reviewed, editor identities checked, indexing searches completed, all fees found, review and ethics policies assessed, and any contradictory evidence. This practice aligns with the multidimensional criteria described by Knight and Steinbach (2008) and Suiter and Sarli (2019). It also helps coauthors and mentors challenge assumptions before rights or fees are committed. A short written record is often more reliable than a later memory of why the journal seemed acceptable.

Prior Public Dissemination and Preprints

Authors should avoid posting a preprint automatically when they have not yet selected a journal and confirmed its policies. A preprint is a publicly accessible manuscript version made available before formal journal peer review, and its public status can complicate later submission if a target journal treats that posting as prior publication or applies version-specific rules. Journal-selection research emphasizes the importance of checking outlet requirements and author priorities before submission (Rowley et al., 2022; Suiter & Sarli, 2019). If the journal associated with a preprint rejects the paper, another journal may require disclosure, a link, anonymization adjustments, or may decline the manuscript under its own prior-publication policy. The practical safeguard is to verify written policies before public posting and preserve a clear version history.

Preprints can also complicate the interpretation of research influence when multiple versions circulate. Citations may accumulate to the preprint and the later journal article separately, creating duplicate or inflated-looking counts in automated profiles even when the underlying work is the same. Because scholarly evaluation already contains information asymmetries, ambiguous versioning can make an author's impact appear less transparent (Bagues et al., 2019). This does not mean every preprint is deceptive, but it means authors should not use duplicated counts as if they represented distinct scholarly contributions. Researchers who wish to protect credibility should disclose version relationships and avoid preprint posting when policy, priority, or citation consequences are uncertain.

Protecting and Repairing a Scholarly Record

The professional harm of questionable publishing usually arises from patterns and consequences, not from a single permanent label. Articles may become difficult to discover, be excluded from formal evaluation, lose stable access, or be associated with publisher sanctions and weak review. Mathew and Patel (2022) frame the problem as a conflict between predatory power and scholarly integrity, while Bagues et al. (2019) show why evaluators may struggle to distinguish genuine quality from superficial signals. A record composed entirely of unverifiable venues can therefore weaken confidence in the researcher's judgment even when individual manuscripts contain useful ideas. Authors protect themselves by prioritizing transparent venues and retaining evidence of the selection and review process.

A scholar can recover from earlier mistakes by changing the trajectory of the record. The useful steps are to stop submitting to unverifiable outlets, seek a librarian or experienced mentor, preserve documentation about the underlying research, and place future work in journals with observable quality controls. Beall (2016) and Elmore and Weston (2020) emphasize author vigilance, but vigilance should be educational rather than stigmatizing because deceptive solicitations target early-career and internationally situated researchers aggressively. A hiring narrative is more credible when it acknowledges what was learned and

demonstrates a sustained improvement in venue choice. The goal is not to erase the past but to create a reliable future pattern.

Consequences Beyond the Individual Author

Questionable publication transfers costs to readers and later researchers as well as to the original author. A paper that appears reviewed may enter a literature search, shape a clinical or organizational claim, or consume time as another researcher attempts to reconcile unsupported findings. Bohannon (2013), Van Noorden (2014), and Mathew and Patel (2022) illustrate different routes through which deficient quality control can admit or circulate unreliable material. Retraction or withdrawal can correct the record, but it cannot recover every citation, downloaded copy, or decision already influenced. Journal selection is therefore an ethical decision about downstream users, not merely a private career transaction.

Institutions also bear consequences when evaluation systems reward questionable output or stigmatize unfamiliar legitimate work. Counting publications without examining venues can incentivize superficial productivity, while relying exclusively on elite rankings can disadvantage fields, topics, regions, and methods that sit outside dominant networks. Bagues et al. (2019) expose the evaluation problems created by information asymmetry, and Grossmann et al. (2019) identify inclusion concerns within highly ranked business publications. A mature policy should request evidence of contribution and venue integrity, allow contextual explanation, and reserve accusations for documented patterns. Institutional judgment becomes more credible when it is transparent about both standards and limitations.

Coauthors face shared but unequal exposure to a poor venue decision. A senior scholar may recover quickly because an established record provides context, while a doctoral student whose first publications appear in questionable outlets may have no countervailing evidence of sound judgment. Demir (2018) shows that participation in predatory publishing should be analyzed through researcher characteristics and motivations rather than caricature. Research teams should therefore discuss outlet criteria, fees, rights, preprints, and author responsibilities before submission, and the corresponding author should circulate the final evidence. Collective due diligence protects junior collaborators from decisions they may feel unable to challenge.

The Burrell Applied Critical Journal Due Diligence Checklist

This checklist is a decision record, not a scoring instrument. A checked item documents that the question was investigated; it does not guarantee legitimacy. Unresolved contradictions in identity, peer review, fees, governance, or rights should carry more weight than the number of reassuring boxes. The checklist applies the multi-criteria approach advanced by Knight and Steinbach (2008), Elmore and Weston (2020), and Suiter and Sarli (2019). Authors should retain the completed record with submission correspondence and revisit it if the journal's behavior changes.

- **Strategic purpose.** State what this publication should accomplish for the research, intended readers, and career trajectory.
- **Scope and article type.** Confirm that recent issues publish the topic, method, evidence type, and manuscript form being submitted.
- **Exact identity.** Match the journal title, ISSN, publisher, domain, and DOI pattern across independent records.
- **Publishing continuity.** Review issue history, publication frequency, archive stability, and unexplained gaps or abrupt title changes.
- **Independent indexing.** Search each claimed index directly and record coverage years, status, title, ISSN, and publisher.
- **Google Scholar discovery.** Use journal-title and site searches to assess visibility, while recording that discovery is not selective validation.

- **Editorial leadership.** Verify the editor and at least two board members through institutional pages or independent scholarly profiles.
- **Peer review process.** Identify the review model, expected stages, decision authority, conflicts policy, and whether rejection is a realistic outcome.
- **Sample-article quality.** Read at least three recent articles for reasoning, methods, citations, disclosure, ethics, editing, and reference consistency.
- **Fees and waivers.** Record every mandatory or conditional charge, payment timing, refund or withdrawal terms, and available waivers.
- **Author rights.** Review copyright, licensing, self-archiving, prior-publication, preprint, withdrawal, and reuse conditions before submission.
- **Corrections and accountability.** Locate policies for corrections, retractions, complaints, appeals, misconduct, and data or image concerns.
- **Metrics and rankings.** Verify metrics with their issuers and treat Beall-related or ABDC information as contextual evidence rather than a verdict.
- **Solicitation quality.** Compare the invitation with the journal's real scope, editor, contact domain, deadlines, and submission system.
- **Conflicting evidence.** Write down inconsistencies and seek clarification from an independent librarian, mentor, or professional association.
- **Final rationale.** Explain why benefits outweigh residual risks and identify what evidence would cause the decision to change.

Conclusion

Strategic publishing is an exercise in scholarly judgment rather than a race toward either prestige or speed. The historical record shows that peer review, editorial boards, metrics, and publisher brands can all be simulated or fail, while selection research shows that legitimate authors must balance audience, fit, access, cost, timing, and career needs. The resulting method is straightforward: define the contribution, verify the journal's identity, confirm indexing in the relevant source, inspect recent articles, authenticate governance, read the review and ethics policies, disclose and assess fees, and document the final decision. Beall-related warnings, ABDC rankings, Google Scholar results, and publisher claims can inform that method, but none should control it alone. A credible lower-tier journal that reaches the right readers is often a better scholarly choice than an impressive-looking outlet whose processes cannot withstand verification.

References

- Bagues, M., Sylos-Labini, M., & Zinovyeva, N. (2019). A walk on the wild side: 'Predatory' journals and information asymmetries in scientific evaluations. *Research Policy*, 48(2), 462–477. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2018.04.013>
- Beall, J. (2016). Best practices for scholarly authors in the age of predatory journals. *The Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England*, 98(2), 77–79. <https://doi.org/10.1308/rcsann.2016.0056>
- Bohannon, J. (2013). Who's afraid of peer review? *Science*, 342(6154), 60–65. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.342.6154.60>
- Burdick, A. (2017, March 22). Paging Dr. Fraud: The fake publishers that are ruining science. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/paging-dr-fraud-the-fake-publishers-that-are-ruining-science>
- Burrell, D. N., & Richardson, K. (2023). What a genuine value-based leadership commitment to hiring African-American Faculty in business, technology, and public health requires at the highest ranked and most prestigious U.S. universities. *HOLISTICA—Journal of Business and Public Administration*, 14(1), 186–200. <https://doi.org/10.2478/hjbpa-2023-0011>
- Burrell, D. N. (2024). Stigmas and limited opportunities of on-line and for-profit university doctorate graduates in technology, healthcare, and business. *Ingeniería Solidaria*, 20(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.16925/2357-6014.2024.01.05>

- Cobey, K. D., Lalu, M. M., Skidmore, B., Ahmadzai, N., Grudniewicz, A., & Moher, D. (2018). What is a predatory journal? A scoping review. *F1000Research*, 7, Article 1001. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.15256.2>
- Demir, S. B. (2018). Predatory journals: Who publishes in them and why? *Journal of Informetrics*, 12(4), 1296–1311. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2018.10.008>
- Elmore, S. A., & Weston, E. H. (2020). Predatory journals: What they are and how to avoid them. *Toxicologic Pathology*, 48(4), 607–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192623320920209>
- Federal Trade Commission. (2019, April 3). *Court rules in FTC's favor against predatory academic publisher OMICS Group; imposes \$50.1 million judgment against defendants that made false claims and hid publishing fees*. <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2019/04/court-rules-ftcs-favor-against-predatory-academic-publisher-omics-group-imposes-501-million-judgment>
- Grossmann, A., Mooney, L., & Dugan, M. (2019). Inclusion fairness in accounting, finance, and management: An investigation of A-star publications on the ABDC journal list. *Journal of Business Research*, 95, 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.10.035>
- Knight, L. V., & Steinbach, T. A. (2008). Selecting an appropriate publication outlet: A comprehensive model of journal selection criteria for researchers in a broad range of academic disciplines. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 3, 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.28945/51>
- Mathew, R. P., & Patel, V. (2022). Predatory journals: The power of the predator versus the integrity of the honest. *Current Problems in Diagnostic Radiology*, 51(5), 740–746. <https://doi.org/10.1067/j.cpradiol.2021.07.005>
- Richtig, G., Berger, M., Lange-Asschenfeldt, B., Aberer, W., & Richtig, E. (2018). Problems and challenges of predatory journals. *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, 32, 1441–1449. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.15039>
- Rowley, J., Sbaffi, L., Sugden, M., & Gilbert, A. (2022). Factors influencing researchers' journal selection decisions. *Journal of Information Science*, 48(3), 321–335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551520958591>
- Suiter, A. M., & Sarli, C. C. (2019). Selecting a journal for publication: Criteria to consider. *Missouri Medicine*, 116(6), 461–465. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6913840/>
- Van Noorden, R. (2014). Publishers withdraw more than 120 gibberish papers. *Nature*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2014.14763>
- Zainuba, M., & Rahal, A. (2015). Assessing the validity of business and management journals ranking list: An alternative approach for determining journal quality. *Annals of Management Science*, 4(2), 1-28.