Professional applications of information literacy: Helping researchers learn to evaluate journal quality

North Carolina Serials Conference
April 9th, 2021. https://go.uncg.edu/ncsc2021
Hello!

Jenny Dale (she/her/hers)
Information Literacy Coordinator
UNCG University Libraries
jedale2@uncg.edu
Hello!

Anna Craft (she/her/hers)
Coordinator of Metadata Services
UNCG University Libraries
arcraft@uncg.edu
Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land we are gathered on has long served as the site of meeting and exchange amongst a number of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Keyauwee and Saura. We also want to acknowledge the long history and lasting legacies of slavery on these lands.

Image credit: "Greetings from Greensboro N.C." in North Carolina Postcard Collection (P052), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill
Today we’re going to:

1. Define information literacy and lateral reading
2. Make connections between information literacy skills and researcher needs
3. Look at examples of predatory publishing solicitations and websites
4. Share resources to help you evaluate journal quality
5. Answer your questions about evaluating publication quality
1. Information literacy
What *is* information literacy?

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries’ Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education:

“Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.”
A quick poll!

Please head to www.menti.com and enter the code 4088 3020 (or use the QR code to the right) to answer a quick poll question about the ACRL Framework!

Results
ACRL Framework 101

- Focus is on the higher education context, and particularly on developing the information literacy skills of students.
- Was adopted in 2015 to replace the Information Literacy Competency Standards, which had been in place since 2000.
- Draws on threshold concepts theory, metaliteracy, metacognition, and the *Understanding by Design* model.
The Framework’s structure

- Introduction
- Six frames (can be thought of as interconnected core concepts or conceptual understandings)
  - Description/discussion of each frame
  - Knowledge practices for each frame
  - Dispositions for each frame
- Appendix 1: Implementing the Framework
- Appendix 2: Background of the Framework development
- Appendix 3: Sources for further reading
The Framework’s structure

- Introduction
- Six frames (can be thought of as interconnected core concepts or conceptual understandings)
  - Description/discussion of each frame
  - Knowledge practices for each frame
  - Dispositions for each frame
- Appendix 1: Implementing the Framework
- Appendix 2: Background of the Framework development
- Appendix 3: Sources for further reading
The frames

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information creation as a process
- Information has value
- Research as inquiry
- Scholarship as conversation
- Searching as strategic exploration
The frames

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information creation as a process
- Information has value
- Research as inquiry
- Scholarship as conversation
- Searching as strategic exploration

Which concept(s) here seem to connect with efforts to help researchers evaluate journal quality? Please feel free to share your answer in the chat (select all panelists and attendees)!
Authority is constructed and contextual

- Examples of knowledge practices
  - “use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources, understanding the elements that might temper this credibility”
  - “understand that many disciplines have acknowledged authorities in the sense of well-known scholars and publications that are widely considered “standard,” and yet, even in those situations, some scholars would challenge the authority of those sources”

(ACRL, 2015)
How do researchers evaluate authority?

- Tenopir et al. (2016) conducted a survey of more than 3,600 researchers “to explore how trust is defined for scholarly information and to discover how scholars worldwide perceive trust to have changed with new forms of scholarly communication” (p. 2347).

- Respondents indicated that a journal’s status as peer-reviewed was a strong indicator of trustworthiness both when reading/using scholarly information and when seeking publishing venues for their own work (Tenopir et al., 2016, p. 2349-2350).
However, with all of the changes in dissemination channels, the methods and criteria used to justify trustworthiness and quality remain surprisingly traditional. Content clues, including checking for soundness of ideas, quality of figures and tables, and reading an abstract remain highly ranked as decision factors when deciding to trust scholarly resources. Traditional criteria such as journal ranking remain essential, even though this is criticized by the very researchers who rely on it. (Tenopir et al., 2016, p. 2355)
A changing scholarly publishing landscape

- Swanberg et al. (2020) surveyed faculty at Oakland University to answer two research questions (p. 209):
  1. What gaps, if any, exist in faculty members’ knowledge of predatory OA journals, including the ability to identify one?
  2. What are faculty attitudes toward predatory OA journals?
- Faculty expressed a range of confidence levels about assessing journal quality.
- Respondents were also asked what resources they used to determine journal quality, and the top 3 responses were: colleagues, Google (or a similar search engine), and professional listservs, blogs, or websites (Swanberg et al., 2020, p. 214).
However, it was clear that faculty were seeking help and more information about predatory OA journals, with most reporting wanting a checklist to assess journal quality (70.9%), followed by information on the library website (65.2%)... Furthermore, our libraries’ educational efforts have focused on developing critical thinking skills in appraising journal quality and legitimacy, which aligns with the Association for College & Research Libraries’ Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. (Swanberg et al., 2020, p. 216)
Authority is constructed and contextual

- Examples of knowledge practices
  - “use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources, understanding the elements that might temper this credibility”
  - “understand that many disciplines have acknowledged authorities in the sense of well-known scholars and publications that are widely considered “standard,” and yet, even in those situations, some scholars would challenge the authority of those sources”

(ACRL, 2015)
Lateral reading: A flexible approach

- Term comes from Sam Wineburg and colleagues
  - Education and History professor at Stanford
  - Founder and Executive Director of the Stanford History Education Group and Stanford's Ph.D. program in History Education

- Wineburg & McGrew (2019) compared the online information evaluation skills of three groups of internet users and found that fact-checkers “employed a powerful heuristic for taking bearings: lateral reading. Fact checkers almost immediately opened up a series of new tabs on the horizontal axis of their browsers before fully reading the article” (p. 19).
Lateral vs. vertical reading

Check Yourself with Lateral Reading: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #3
Why read laterally?

Caulfield (2017, ch. 16):

- “...good fact-checkers read ‘laterally,’ across many connected sites instead of digging deep into the site at hand.”
- “Lateral readers don’t spend time on the page or site until they’ve first gotten their bearings by looking at what other sites and resources say about the source at which they are looking.”
- “Lateral reading helps the reader understand both the perspective from which the site’s analyses come and if the site has an editorial process or expert reputation that would allow one to accept the truth of a site’s facts.”
Supplement checklist approaches with lateral reading!

Let’s take a look at **Think. Check. Submit.**
2. Evaluating journal quality
Another quick poll!

Please head to www.menti.com and enter the code 5732 4168 (or use the QR code to the right) to answer a quick poll question about predatory journals!

Results
If you have, you’re not alone!

- Many academics receive solicitations from predatory and exploitative publications
- The more you publish, the more of these solicitations you will likely receive
- If you’re in a discipline that produces article-based scholarship, you’re likely to encounter predatory journals
"What makes a journal "predatory"?
How do we define predatory?

“Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices”

Note: Using the label “predatory” in relation to publications can cause discomfort for some people.

Also, journals and publishers tend to strongly dislike being labeled as “predatory,” especially publicly.
Is there a better term?

- Bad faith?
- Bogus?
- Deceptive?
- Dishonest?
- Exploitative?
- Fake?
- Fraudulent?
- Manipulative?
- Questionable?
- Unethical?

Maybe?

But for our purposes right now, “predatory” is the term that seems to be most recognized and used for this behavior (in the library field and beyond)
So how do we know if a journal is predatory?
Red flags

- Accepting articles quickly with little or no peer review or quality control
- Notifying authors of publication fees only after manuscripts are accepted, and aggressively demanding payment
- Aggressively soliciting academics with requests to submit articles or serve on editorial boards (often via direct email)
- Listing real academics as members of editorial boards without their permission, and not honoring requests from individuals wishing to resign or remove themselves from these positions
- Creating and appointing fake academic personas to serve on editorial boards

List adapted from Wikipedia
More red flags

- Mimicking the name and/or duplicating the website style of an established journal
- Making misleading claims about the publishing operation, such as a false place of publication
- Citing a fake or non-existent impact factor
- Claiming to be "indexed" by academic social networking sites (ResearchGate, Academia.edu)
- Highlighting standard identifiers (ISSNs, DOIs) as if they were prestigious or reputable bibliographic indicators

List adapted from Wikipedia
Direct email solicitations are common

- Unsolicited emails may praise your work, and may include citations of recent papers you’ve published
- Your area of research may have little or no relation to the topic on which they are soliciting content
- Solicitation email and/or journal website uses poor grammar and/or spelling
- Content solicitation email may also offer you the “opportunity” to join the editorial board
Should I just assume that any publication that sends direct email solicitations is not a publication I want to be associated with?
Remember:
Journal practices can change over time, and personal experiences with and evaluations of individual journals can vary.
Let’s look at some examples
Some journals don’t need much evaluation
Some journals really don’t need much evaluation.
Unfortunately, it’s not always so easy
Dear Anna R. Craft,

Greetings and good day.

I represent Editorial Office of Whioce Publishing Pte. Ltd. from Singapore. We have come across your recent article, “Digital Scholarship Planning: A Perspective on the CNI-ARL Workshop” published in Serials Review. We feel that the topic of this article is very interesting. Therefore, we are delighted to invite you to join the Editorial Board of our journal, entitled Progress in Human Computer Interaction. We also hope that you can submit your future work in our journal. Please reply to this email if you are interested in joining the Editorial Board.

I look forward to hearing your positive response. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Best regards,
KH NG
Editorial Office
Progress in Human Computer Interaction
Dear Craft, AR

Greetings!

We have learnt about your precious paper with the title *Is This a Quality Journal to Publish In How Can You Tell* which has been published in *SERIALS REVIEW*, and the topic of the paper has impressed us a lot. It has drawn attention and interest from researchers and scholars specializing in academic journals; academic libraries; open access; predatory publishing; scholarly communication.

**Invitation to Contribute Your Research Paper**

Created with the aim to promote communications within scientific community, *International Journal of Information and Communication Sciences* can make experts in various ranges closer to the cutting-edge researches around the world. In view of the advance, novelty, and possible wide application of your innovation, we invite you to send other unpublished works of related fields to the journal. We are also quite looking forward to receiving your further research on the published paper.

If you have any interest, please refer to the following link for more information:

[http://www.ijics.net/submission](http://www.ijics.net/submission)
Manuscript Submission

Online Submission System
Publishing your research article in a Science Publishing Group journal is simple and efficient. Science Publishing Group journals use online submission system:

http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/login

Download Manuscript Template  Download Manuscript CheckList

Manuscript Preparation
Manuscript length should be 6 to 18 pages. Science Publishing Group can exceptionally accept shorter or longer manuscripts, provided that the scientific content is of high value. No additional page charges are required if a manuscript is substantially longer than 17 pages. All submitted manuscripts must include the following items:

Title - Make sure that the title is specific and concise. Titles should be presented in title case - all words except the first word should be in lower case letters.

List of authors, their affiliations and email addresses - Provide the full names and affiliations of all the authors. Affiliations should include department,
Indicators of questionable journals

But I received this email in 2019!
Not all predatory journal websites and emails show immediate, glaring red flags.

You may need to consult other resources to help you learn about the journal in question.
That’s where lateral reading comes in!

1. Read the email solicitation
2. Look at the journal website
3. Still can’t tell? Time to check with the rest of the internet
But where do I start?
Google it! (or use the search engine of your choice)

- Don’t just read what the journal or publisher says about itself; read what others say about it
- Search for the journal, publisher, or conference name and the word “predatory”
- Wikipedia can sometimes provide information about journal or publisher history/behavior (and links with documentation)
Talk to colleagues

- Advisors, mentors, other colleagues (and, of course, librarians) may have experience with a particular journal or publisher
- Do you know someone on the journal’s editorial board?
  - Reach out and ask them about their experience
Is the publication included in **DOAJ**? If so, that’s a positive sign: [https://doaj.org/](https://doaj.org/)
There are **NO PUBLICATION FEES** (article processing charges or APCs) to publish with this journal. Other charges may apply.

This journal uses a CC BY license.

→ Look up their open access statement and their license.

Publishers:

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, United States

Manuscripts accepted in English
Is the journal indexed?

- Where does the journal *say* they are indexed?
  - Actual, legitimate scholarly indexes?

- Where is the journal *actually* indexed?
  - Consider checking your preferred indexes to see if you can find content from the journal
Some websites track predatory journals

- Exercise your own judgement when using these sites/lists
- Consider who is creating and maintaining the list
- Look for the criteria used in creating the list
- How old is the list/site? Is it still updated and maintained?
- Examples:
  - Beall’s List
  - Cabells' Predatory Reports (subscription required)
  - Stop Predatory Journals
Even with all these resources, evaluating journals can be tricky
Evaluating a journal, example #1

- Journal is listed in DOAJ ✅
- Publisher is a member of COPE ✅
- Journal website is clear about policies on open access, copyright, author fees; no immediate glaring red flags on website or email communications ✅
- Journal is not indexed in any major academic search systems 😞
- Journal is new-ish; established ~4 years ago ❓❓
New journals can be tough to evaluate

- It takes time to get established - both for academics and for publications!
- Do you know any of the people involved in developing the journal?
- Is there an institution or scholarly group associated with the journal?
- What information can you find about the publisher?
Evaluating a journal, example #2

- Journal is listed in [DOAJ](https://doi.org/)
- Publisher *was* on [Beall’s List](https://doi.org/), but has been removed
- Publisher’s Wikipedia page details major peer review scandals from several years ago
- An acquaintance from a nearby university is a guest editor for the issue
Sometimes there may not be a clear answer

You may find conflicting information online (or learn conflicting information from colleagues), with some who have had a positive experience with a certain publisher, and others who say a publisher or journal is predatory and tell you to steer clear.

**In these cases, you have to determine your own level of comfort with the particular publisher and/or journal.**
Helping researchers learn to evaluate journals can be challenging!

What tools and techniques do you use for educating researchers about predatory journals?

Please share!
THANKS!

Any questions?

- Jenny: jedale2@uncg.edu
- Anna: arcraft@uncg.edu

Slides:
https://go.uncg.edu/ncsc2021
Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Unsplash
References

http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework

https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/


Resources

- Think Check Submit: https://thinkchecksubmit.org/
- Directory of Open Access Journals: https://doaj.org
- Beall’s List: https://beallslist.net/
- Cabell’s Predatory Reports: http://www2.cabells.com/about-predatory (subscription required)
- Stop Predatory Journals: https://predatoryjournals.com/