

# Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association

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## Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing

December 19, 2013 by [Claire Redhead](#) [10 Comments](#)

### Introduction

The Committee on Publication Ethics, the Directory of Open Access Journals, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, and the World Association of Medical Editors are scholarly organizations that have seen an increase in the number of membership applications from both legitimate and non-legitimate publishers and journals. Our organizations have collaborated in an effort to identify principles of transparency and best practice that set apart legitimate journals and publishers from non-legitimate ones and to clarify that these principles form part of the criteria on which membership applications will be evaluated.

These criteria are largely derived from those developed by the Directory of Open Access Journals. Note that additional membership criteria may also be used by each of the scholarly organizations. The organizations intend to share information in order to develop lists of legitimate journals and publishers. We do not intend to develop or publish a list of publishers or journals that failed to demonstrate they met the criteria for transparency and best practice.

This is a work in progress and we welcome feedback on the general principles and the specific criteria. Background on the organizations is below.

*About the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE,*  
<http://publicationethics.org/>)

COPE provides advice to editors and publishers on all aspects of publication ethics and, in particular, how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct. It also provides a forum for its members to discuss individual cases. COPE does not investigate individual cases but encourages editors to ensure that cases are investigated by the appropriate authorities (usually a research institution or employer).

All COPE members are expected to follow the Codes of Conduct for Journal Editors and Publishers.

*About the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ,*  
<http://www.doaj.org/>)

The mission of the DOAJ is: to curate, maintain and develop a source of reliable information about open access scholarly journals on the web; to verify that entries on the list comply with reasonable standards; to increase the visibility, dissemination, discoverability and attraction of open access journals; to enable scholars, libraries, universities, research funders and other stakeholders to benefit from the information and services provided; to facilitate the integration of open access journals into library and aggregator services; to assist, where possible, publishers and their journals to meet reasonable digital publishing standards; and to thereby support the transition of the system of scholarly communication and publishing into a model that serves science, higher education, industry, innovation, societies and the people. Through this work, DOAJ will cooperate and collaborate with all interested parties working toward these objectives.

*About the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA,*  
<http://oaspa.org/>)

The OASPA is a trade association that was established in 2008 in order to represent the interests of Open Access (OA) publishers

globally in all scientific, technical and scholarly disciplines. This mission will be carried out through exchanging information, setting standards, advancing models, advocacy, education, and the promotion of innovation.

*About the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME,*  
<http://www.wame.org>)

WAME is a global nonprofit voluntary association of editors of peer-reviewed medical journals who seek to foster cooperation and communication among editors; improve editorial standards; promote professionalism in medical editing through education, self-criticism, and self-regulation; and encourage research on the principles and practice of medical editing. WAME develops policies and recommendations of best practices for medical journal editors and has a syllabus for editors that members are encouraged to follow.

### Principles of Transparency

- 1. Peer review process:** All of a journal's content, apart from any editorial material that is clearly marked as such, shall be subjected to peer review. Peer review is defined as obtaining advice on individual manuscripts from reviewers expert in the field who are not part of the journal's editorial staff. This process, as well as any policies related to the journal's peer review procedures, shall be clearly described on the journal's Web site.
- 2. Governing Body:** Journals shall have editorial boards or other governing bodies whose members are recognized experts in the subject areas included within the journal's scope. The full names and affiliations of the journal's editors shall be provided on the journal's Web site.
- 3. Editorial team/contact information** Journals shall provide the full names and affiliations of the journal's editors on the journal's Web site as well as contact information for the editorial office.
- 4. Author fees:** Any fees or charges that are required for manuscript processing and/or publishing materials in the journal shall be clearly stated in a place that is easy for potential authors to find prior to submitting their manuscripts for review or explained to

authors before they begin preparing their manuscript for submission.

**5. Copyright:** Copyright and licensing information shall be clearly described on the journal's Web site, and licensing terms shall be indicated on all published articles, both HTML and PDFs.

**6. Identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct:** Publishers and editors shall take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. In no case shall a journal or its editors encourage such misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place. In the event that a journal's publisher or editors are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in their journal – the publisher or editor shall follow COPE's guidelines (or equivalent) in dealing with allegations.

**7. Ownership and management:** Information about the ownership and/or management of a journal shall be clearly indicated on the journal's Web site. Publishers shall not use organizational names that would mislead potential authors and editors about the nature of the journal's owner.

**8. Web site:** A journal's Web site, including the text that it contains, shall demonstrate that care has been taken to ensure high ethical and professional standards.

**9. Name of journal:** The Journal name shall be unique and not be one that is easily confused with another journal or that might mislead potential authors and readers about the Journal's origin or association with other journals.

**10. Conflicts of interest:** A journal shall have clear policies on handling potential **conflicts of interest** of editors, authors, and reviewers and the policies should be clearly stated.

**11. Access:** The way(s) in which the journal and individual articles are available to readers and whether there are associated subscription or pay per view fees shall be stated.

**12. Revenue sources:** Business models or revenue sources (eg, author fees, subscriptions, advertising, reprints, institutional

support, and organizational support) shall be clearly stated or otherwise evident on the journal's Web site.

**13. Advertising:** Journals shall state their advertising policy if relevant, including what types of ads will be considered, who makes decisions regarding accepting ads and whether they are linked to content or reader behavior (online only) or are displayed at random.

**14. Publishing schedule:** The periodicity at which a journal publishes shall be clearly indicated.

**15. Archiving:** A journal's plan for electronic backup and preservation of access to the journal content (for example, access to main articles via CLOCKSS or PubMedCentral) in the event a journal is no longer published shall be clearly indicated.

**16. Direct marketing:** Any direct marketing activities, including solicitation of manuscripts that are conducted on behalf of the journal, shall be appropriate, well targeted, and unobtrusive.

In the event that a member organization is found to have violated these best practices, OASPA/DOAJ/COPE/WAME shall in the first instance try to work with them in order to address any concerns that have been raised. In the event that the member organization is unable or unwilling to address these concerns, their membership in the organization may be suspended or terminated. All of the member organizations have procedures for dealing with concerns raised about member journals.

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## Comments



[Dr. Asoka Misra](#) says

[December 21, 2013 at 11:05 am](#)

Lately there has been lot of pro-n-con voices raised over the purpose, its utilities, and the effectiveness of this Peer Review Process (as it exists) in the scholarly publishing world. Also there is a clear sense of disapproval to this process raising its head can no more be over ruled/looked today. Under such circumstance, therefore, keeping the same in No. 1, position in the list of ” Principles of Transparency ” seem to be out of place and NOT timely.

[Reply](#)



[Frank Lowney](#) says

[December 22, 2013 at 2:24 pm](#)

This is a wonderful effort. Kudos to all who are working toward realizing these excellent principles. However, there do seem to be a few areas of neglect. One of those areas is the effort to find ways to disengage scholarly publishing from being such a revenue-driven enterprise. There might be other models, especially where one takes note of the circuitous route from production to consumption. Couldn't this route be shortened significantly in the digital era and might that not lower costs and lessen the concern with revenue?

Another is the involvement of scholarly publishing with the evaluation of academic performance (promotion and tenure). Input into P&T decision making has become a form of currency used to acquire services such as peer review and that has a corrupting potential.

Finally, why does scholarly publishing have to be such

a Byzantine patchwork of separate and distinct interests, each reinventing the same wheels?

### Reply



**Dieter Scholz** says

**January 6, 2014 at 11:01 am**

Congratulation for teaming up and unifying OA Publisher's Best Practice!

Congratulation also to: "We do not intend to develop or publish a list of publishers or journals that failed to demonstrate they met the criteria for transparency and best practice." This is a clear statement that blacklisting is not the way forward, but only whitelisting after careful checks of membership applications. Well done!

The same text is posted not only on the OASPA web site, but also on the web sites of COPE and WAME. However not (yet) on DOAJ's site.

OASPA provides a place to discuss this initiative (nice!). The only place among the 4 partners. No wonder I write here.

The common "Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing" (let's shorten to: "Best Practice") are said to be "largely derived from those developed by the Directory of Open Access Journals". I am comparing the "16 points" from "Best Practice" with DOAJ's "Good practice guidelines for Open Access publishers" (<http://www.doaj.org/publishers>) and "Selection Criteria" (<http://www.doaj.org/about>). I see important differences between DOAJ's rules and the "16 points". The differences I observe are in my view, more than "additional membership criteria". I see here a little

contradiction to the message in “Best Practice”.

If the initiative says “additional membership criteria may also be used by each of the scholarly organizations”, then I would imagine that all “16 points” could be clearly and easily be identified also in <http://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria>. However, this is not really the case (e.g. 6, 10, 13, 14 are not clearly stated, 15 is only “desirable”).

OASPA states (<http://oaspa.org/membership/membership-criteria>) COPE membership as “desirable”. What about DOAJ membership? Is it necessary to be a member in parallel at OASPA, COPE and DOAJ (and WAME for medical publishers) for “Best Practice” or should it not rather be such that with unified “Best Practice” one membership is sufficient? I understand from “Our organizations have collaborated in an effort to identify principles ...that ... form part of the criteria on which membership applications will be evaluated” that one membership is sufficient for a publisher to be considered “whitelisted”.

What about being indexed by DOAJ. To meet DOAJ’s criteria is a prerequisite for being indexed. If indexed, DOAJ also provides the logo “Indexed In DOAJ” on request. DOAJ maintains “donations remain absolutely voluntary”. Therefore: Is “Indexed In DOAJ” sufficient to be considered “whitelisted” also by the other partners of “Best Practice”?

More memberships are certainly always helpful, but costs do add up and APC should be as low as possible. Some monetary numbers seen by a larger publisher (per year): OASPA: 1500 GBP, DOAJ: 3000 GBP, COPE: about 10000 GBP, Portico and/or CLOCKSS: about 1000 USD each; there are more memberships necessary (CrossRef, CrossCheck, ...).

The initiative states “This is a work in progress and we welcome feedback”. I want to provide just this:

Feedback to very good work (in progress). I hope to find answers to my questions and hope to see more such excellent developments in OA publishing.

### Reply



Lars Bjørnshauge says

January 20, 2014 at 10:51 pm

Dieter, thank you for the feedback. A couple of comments:

While the DOAJ site is under development we cannot currently offer space to cater for discussion. The Best Practice statement will as well be published on the DOAJ when we are ready.

Regarding membership to DOAJ: Supporting DOAJ financially for instance for a publisher contributing recommended fees is completely independent from a journal being listed in the DOAJ. If a journal complies with the selection criteria and as such has passed the evaluation it will be listed, regardless whether a publisher has supported DOAJ financially or not! Since DOAJ is 100% dependent on funding from the community any financial contribution will be highly appreciated, and of course more support will enable DOAJ process journals faster.

As to the criteria: It is correct that the points in the Best Practice statement are largely derived from the NEW criteria DOAJ is about to implement.

News about the new criteria will be distributed during the coming days. The new criteria will be much more detailed, and the information the

journal/publisher provides during the application process will be publicly available. All journals currently listed in the DOAJ will have to reapply, and there will be a grace period of 12-15 months, depending on how all this will work out.

## Reply



**Dieter Scholz** says

**June 10, 2014 at 5:24 pm**

Dear Lars,

some time has past since your helpful blog entry. Many things have become reality since then:

- 1.) The new DOAJ Application Form is online.
- 2.) DOAJ has now a news/discussion forum on its site.
- 3.) DOAJ has made reference to the “Principles of Transparency“. This was done for the first time on 2014-06-09:  
<http://doajournals.wordpress.com/2014/06/09/some-minor-edits-to-the-application-form/>
- 4.) There is online help to distinguish Questions (DOAJ Application Form) from Selection Criteria (e.g. on <http://doaj.org/about>). Read:  
<http://doajournals.wordpress.com/2014/05/22/doaj-publishes-lists-of-journals-removed-and-added/comment-page-1/#comment-2>

However:

a) I do NOT see that „It is correct that the points in the Best Practice statement [“Principles of Transparency“] are largely derived from the NEW criteria DOAJ is [was] about to implement.“

b) Selection Criteria (e.g. on <http://doaj.org/about>) did not change much during last months. It's the new Questions on the DOAJ Application Form that make the difference. But we can understand very little from the Questions about Selection. E.g.: Do journals need a digital archiving policy for acceptance in the DOAJ? I read contradicting statements!

c) I also do not see a clear 1:1 mapping of DOAJ's Criteria elaborated in “What Your Journal MUST HAVE for Acceptance“ with the “Principles of Transparency“. Read: <http://doajournals.wordpress.com/2014/05/22/doaj-publishes-lists-of-journals-removed-and-added/comment-page-1/#comment-2>

I am concerned a debate may start, once DOAJ gets into mass checking of journals while the application of various criteria has not been fully clarified.

I appreciate any help on these issues. I am positive we can work this out early enough!

Dieter

[Reply](#)



**Dieter Scholz** says  
[September 4, 2014 at 8:54 pm](#)

I can now at least post the ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS from above. Dominic Mitchell (Dom) from DOAJ was kind enough to answer them in an e-mail to me dated 2014-09-01. I quote partially from his e-mail:

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b) Selection Criteria (we can understand very little from the Questions about Selection)

Dom: "DOAJ has said from the beginning that the new criteria would eventually become the questions in the application form. Today, the new criteria ARE the application form. We haven't received very much feedback from the community indicating that it does not understand this."

Take just two examples (I could go on):  
QUESTION: 10) Contact's email address?

CRITERION: Unknown!

OPEN TO DISCUSSION: With what sort of e-mail address will a journal reflect poor journal standards and may even fail its application? We may have come across a criterion: "The publishers' officers use email addresses that end in .gmail.com, yahoo.com some other free email supplier"

QUESTION: 23) What digital archiving policy does the journal use?

CRITERION: Dom: "[With respect to] archiving specifically: this refers back to Best Practice. It is in publishers' own interests to archive their content, to ensure the longevity and findability of their articles. We want to know if

publisher archive but we are not forcing publishers to do so.” In other words: A journal does not need to have it to be indexed in DOAJ, but has to have it to obtain the DOAJ SEAL. Note: DOAJ is not applying “Principles of Transparency” number 15! (I think this is a reasonable decision, but it remains a contradiction.)

—

c) I also do not see a clear 1:1 mapping of DOAJ’s Criteria ...

Dom: “When DOAJ started on the process of upgrading the criteria at the end of 2012, we said openly that it would be an evolving process and not just a one-off. The nature of open access publishing does not allow us to draw lines in the sand. We are always ready to reassess our decisions at DOAJ and we do that with the assistance of our advisory board.”

It is not clear where exactly the line is drawn in the sand today and this ambiguity will remain also in the future.

—

a) I do NOT see that the Principles of Transparency are largely derived from the NEW DOAJ criteria.

In the end, it does not matter where the Principles of Transparency are from. I am left with the impression that it was nice for all organizations to make a statement. But after that we all can go on. It is similar to the Open Access Spectrum (OAS). Have we

heard much about this again?

### Reply



**WoW!ter** says

**January 6, 2014 at 10:18 pm**

To describe the peer review process in the editorial page of a journal website is not sufficient to my idea. I would propose the following stages for the transparency of the peer review process:

- 1 \*: Providing clear dates of submission, revision, acceptance and publication
- 2 \*\*: Listing the reviewers involved once a year
- 3 \*\*\*: Providing a yearly overview of submissions and acceptance
- 4 \*\*\*\*: Naming the handling editors and reviewers per article
- 5 \*\*\*\*\*: Publishing the review reports online alongside the final article

I have discussed these stages at <http://wowter.net/2013/12/24/towards-five-stars-transparent-pre-publication-peer-review/>

### Reply



**Dieter Scholz** says

**January 13, 2014 at 7:31 pm**

How to Evaluate the Peer Review Process? Hoax versus Transparency

“Best Practice” asks for: “1. Peer review process: All of a journal’s content ... shall be subjected to peer review ... This process ... shall be clearly described on the journal’s Web site.”

This would mean, OASPA, COPE, DOAJ or WAME will (only) check the description of the web site of the peer review process. Concern has been raised that this may not be enough. I agree. The question is: How and what else to check?

Hoax Manuscripts?

What does it prove in the long run sending test/sting /prank/hoax manuscripts to journals/publishers? Compare with this: You consider traveling with an aircraft. Latest news reports about a fatal aircraft crash of airline A. Do you stop to fly? Do you stop to fly with airline A? We understand it is a matter of probability. One hoax manuscript that passed is very, very bad, but it is not the end of publishing. You would need to have measures like “stings passed per number of papers published” - but stings would need to be received in sufficient high numbers or it will statistically not be relevant.

Hoax manuscripts are in any case malicious in nature and remind me of hacking which can be good or bad but in any case ethically problematic

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker\\_%28computer\\_security%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_%28computer_security%29)). Hoax manuscripts will annoy editors-in-chief (EiC). Hoax manuscripts produced automatically / randomly will sooner or later be resisted automatically by “editorial fire walls”.

Publishers are blamed if a hoax manuscript passes, but it is not the publisher that passed it. Assuming the publisher puts an EiC in place – say, a professor from a legitimate university. The EiC puts the editorial board in place, defines and guides the peer review process. He is free to do so, because of

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

[/wiki/Editorial\\_independence](#). How can the publisher be blamed for the hoax that got passed?

OASPA, COPE, DOAJ, and WAME do NOT ask for hoax manuscripts. They look at the Peer Review Process as part of their “Principles of Transparency”. Well done!

Transparency, but how much?

Wouter Gerritsma (WoW!ter) proposes 5 stages (stars) of transparency in the review process. Thanks for this proposal! I agree in principle, but some hints:

a) It seems reasonable to name the handling editor. In the end someone needs to be accountable for the review process of a certain manuscript.

b) Putting the reviewer’s names on a paper can be questioned. There are advantages and disadvantages of an open versus a blind review process (<http://www.elsevier.com/reviewers/peer-review>).

c) It is not simply a publishers/editors decision one and for all times how open a review process should be. Individual people are involved; each of them has an individual sense where the limit of openness is reached. This is especially true, when it comes to the 5th stage (star). We may share many things on the Internet, but some people may not want to share their cell phone number. Authors may not want to publish all their mistakes revealed in the review process. Reviewers may not want to reveal that they asked for an unreasonable change. It is the shining end result of the review process everyone involved is proud of.

d) Journals may not take up the stages of transparency of the review process exactly in the given order. Alternatively, each measure implemented could be worth one star and stars are added up.

e) It would be unrealistic to demand 5 stars as a prerequisite for membership at OASPA, COPE,

DOAJ, or WAME. The organizations should define their minimum requirements.

Show Review Process Transparency on the OAS!  
The transparency (openness) scale of the review process should be included in the Open Access Spectrum (OAS) as a new 7th dimension (more: <http://oaspa.org/new-guide-on-openness-is-released/#comment-5235>). The more transparent the better, but individuals must not be forced to transparency (with respect to reviewer's names and review reports). I would also not want a policy of "you are transparent or you leave".

[Reply](#)



[Adam Etkin](#) says

[February 26, 2015 at 1:43 am](#)

I think this is a great step in the right direction. If there is anything we can do to assist regarding the verification and increased transparency of peer review, please don't hesitate to contact us. That's exactly why PRE (Peer Review Evaluation) was created.

[Reply](#)



Claire Redhead says

[April 17, 2015 at 1:15 pm](#)

This joint agreement is being reviewed by the organisations involved and any updates will be posted on our blog. But it should be noted that with immediate effect OASPA will keep all information

regarding applications in progress or rejected as confidential.

[Reply](#)

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