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DOAJ indexing criteria and how to apply: A guide for OA journals

16-20 minutes



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If you publish open access journals, the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ) should be at the top of your indexing list. DOAJ indexing has long served as a mark of journal quality to scholars and their institutions, and today it's increasingly becoming a core open access publishing standard. For example, [Plan S](#) requires journals to be indexed in the DOAJ as part of its [implementation guidelines](#). Many open access publishing organizations also use DOAJ indexing as part of their admittance criteria, including the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), which now [requires](#) all journal publisher members to have at least one journal included in the DOAJ.

In addition to serving as proof of publication quality, [having journals indexed in the DOAJ](#) can help expand their reach. The [DOAJ's mission](#) is to “increase the visibility, accessibility, reputation, usage and impact of quality, peer-reviewed, open access scholarly research journals globally.” You can be sure that including journals in the DOAJ will help make them more discoverable online.

So what are the DOAJ's indexing criteria? And how can you apply to add one or more journals to the DOAJ? We break down everything you need to know in this blog post.

Applying to the DOAJ is free and once you've met all of the indexing criteria you can easily submit an application!

DOAJ indexing criteria

Since it was launched in 2003, the DOAJ has indexed *over 13,000 open access journals* in its community-curated database. The index is open to OA journals in all subject areas and all languages, and includes a wide variety of publications in STEM, the humanities, and the social sciences. So *ALL* OA journals that meet the DOAJ indexing criteria can and should apply to be indexed in the DOAJ.

The DOAJ's definition of "journals" is "scientific and scholarly periodicals that publish research or review papers in full text." The DOAJ also states, "at least a third of the content should consist of peer reviewed original research and/or review papers." And, to be admitted into the DOAJ, the full-text of a journal's content must be openly accessible immediately upon publication—a [requirement shared by Plan S](#).

The DOAJ aims to be the go-to place for searches for quality, peer-reviewed open access content and, as such, it has some pretty specific inclusion criteria. In good news, the DOAJ's indexing criteria are all straightforward and relatively easy to meet!

In this section, we overview the DOAJ's indexing criteria and what you need to know to fulfill them.

Required basic journal information

The first part of the DOAJ application is some "required basic journal information." As the name suggests, these are foundational publication questions that every journal should be able to answer. The required basic journal information is:

- Journal Title—be sure to spell out the complete journal title to match the title registered with all official publication identifiers (e.g. ISSN)
- Journal website URL—you must have a journal website to be included in the DOAJ, so if you're starting a journal you'll need to have it set up first (you'll also need to publish at least five research articles before applying as noted below)
- Journal ISSN (print version)—note this is required but *only* if you have a print ISSN otherwise leave it blank
- Journal ISSN (online version)—the DOAJ notes this cannot be the same as the P-ISSN, "write the EISSN with the hyphen - e.g. 1234-4321"
- Publisher—this is the organization that officially publishes the journal, whether it's a press, learned society, or academic non-profit
- Name and email address for the main contact for the journal—Make sure this is someone who will be available and responsive if the DOAJ needs to reach out with questions/next steps now or in the future

- The country where the journal's publisher is based (i.e. carries out the majority of its publishing activities)
- Whether the journal has article processing charges (APCs)—yes or no response
- URL to the page where all APC information can be found—this is required, so even if a journal charges no fees you'll need a statement explaining that somewhere on the website
- Whether the journal has an article submission charge
- URL to the page where all article submission fee information can be found—this is required, so even if a journal charges no fees you'll need a statement explaining that somewhere on the website
- The number of research and review articles that the journal published in the last calendar year—a journal must publish at least 5 research articles per year to stay in the DOAJ
- URL where the number of articles the journal published in the last calendar year can be found—this can be a link to a journal issue published within the last year with at least 5 articles, or to a list of volumes/issues
- Whether the journal has a waiver policy?—you'll need to select “yes” or “no,” if the journal has no fees just select “no” (if “yes” you'll need to provide a URL where waiver policy information can be found)
- The digital archiving policy the journal uses (e.g. CLOCKSS, Portico, a national library)—while a digital archiving policy is not required by the DOAJ it is *strongly recommended*
- URL where the journal's digital archiving policy information can be found—this field is optional if you select “no policy in place”
- Does the journal allow software/spiders to automatically crawl the journal content (also known as text mining)?—yes or no (allowing automatic crawling is not required for admittance into the DOAJ but is *strongly recommended*)
- The article identifiers the journal uses (e.g. DOI, Handles)—while article identifiers are not required for indexing they are *strongly recommended*
- Whether the journal will provide or intends to provide article-level metadata to the DOAJ (providing metadata is not required but is *strongly recommended*)
- Whether the journal provides individual article download stats—yes or no (This is not required but if “yes” you will need to provide a URL where that information can be found)
- The first calendar year in which a complete volume of the journal's articles were provided online in full-text—if the journal flipped to OA use the year it officially became OA
- Full-text article formats available (PDF, HTML, ePUB, XML, Other)
- Up to 6 keyword(s) that best describe the subject area of the journal (comma delimited)
- The language(s) that the full text of articles is published in

You'll notice that for a few of the criteria above the DOAJ requires journals to not only provide a "yes" or "no" answer but to also include a URL to where information on the topic can be found on the journal website. For example, journals must be able to link to a page on their website that overviews publication fee information (APCs/submission fees). In instances where a URL is required for both "yes" and "no" responses, like for the questions about journal fees, the journal website should include transparent language on the subject, even if that is to say the journal *does not* charge any author-facing fees. This is part of the DOAJ's commitment to publication transparency. All journals listed in the DOAJ are expected to follow the "[Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing](#)," which the DOAJ co-created in partnership with The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), OASPA, and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). We overview additional DOAJ publication transparency requirements in the next section.

It's important to note that every journal applying to the DOAJ must have its own website, whether it's a dedicated journal domain or a subdomain. Additionally, all of the journal's "business information pages," which the DOAJ defines as "the journal's aims and scope, the editorial board, the instructions for authors, the description of the quality control system, the Open Access statement, the plagiarism policy, and the licensing terms)," must be hosted on the journal's website, not a separate publisher website, so that visitors can quickly find all of the basic journal information they need.

Quick Note: If you use Scholastica's OA publishing platform, we've put together a quick guide to how to ensure your Scholastica account is set up to meet the DOAJ indexing criteria and how to answer DOAJ application questions that you can [find here](#).

Editorial process quality and transparency

In addition to the above "required basic journal information," the DOAJ also requires journals to display that they have robust editorial processes and that all editorial process information is publicly available. The DOAJ asks for the following editorial process and quality information:

- A URL to the Editorial Board page
- The review process for papers submitted to the journal (editorial review, peer review, blind peer review, double-blind peer review, open peer review, none)—note, *if "none" the journal will be rejected by the DOAJ*
- URL where information on the journal's review process can be found
- URL for the journal's aims and scope
- URL for the journal's instructions for authors
- Whether the journal has a policy for screening for plagiarism—yes or no (if "yes" you'll need to provide a URL where that information can be found)
- The average number of weeks between submission and publication

Of the above items, all but the plagiarism policy are required, and having a plagiarism policy is strongly recommended by the DOAJ. With regard to the Editorial Board, all journals must have an editor and an editorial board. Additionally, all journals must follow a peer review process, with the exception of arts and humanities journals, which may use a form of editorial review with only two editors and no editorial board.

Copyright license and open access statement

Next in the DOAJ's indexing criteria is copyright information. The DOAJ requires all journals to clearly state how open published content will be in an OA statement listed on the journal's website. DOAJ applicants are required to provide a URL to their journal's OA statement. This can usually be housed on the journal's author information page or a journal policies page. You can find an example OA statement from the DOAJ [here](#). Additionally, all journals applying to the DOAJ must provide information on:

- Whether the journal embeds or displays licensing information in its articles—yes or no (this is not required but is *strongly recommended*)
- Whether the journal allows reuse and remixing of content in accordance with a [Creative Commons license](#) or other type of license with similar conditions—the DOAJ requires journals to use a Creative Commons license or CC equivalent
- The URL on your site where your journal's license terms are stated—journals must include a clear copyright policy/statement on their website
- Whether the journal allows readers to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of its articles and to use them for any other lawful purpose—yes or no (in order to be indexed in the DOAJ this must be a “yes”)
- The deposit policy directory where the journal has a registered deposit policy (e.g. Sherpa/Romeo)—this is not a requirement for DOAJ indexing but it is *strongly recommended*
- Whether the journal allows author(s) to hold copyright without restrictions—yes or no (if “yes” you'll need to provide a URL where that information can be found)
- Whether the journal allows the author(s) to retain publishing rights without restrictions—yes or no (if “yes” you'll need to provide a URL where that information can be found)

Quick Note: For journals that use [Scholastica's OA publishing platform](#), we explain how you can easily set a default Creative Commons copyright license for all of the articles that you publish [here](#). Once you set this up you can select “yes” for the DOAJ application question “Does the journal embed or display licensing information in its articles?”

How to apply to the DOAJ and what to expect

Once you know that your journal(s) meet all of the core DOAJ indexing criteria, you're ready to apply. In this section, we overview the application and review process.

Applying to the DOAJ

Once you've fulfilled all of the DOAJ indexing criteria, the application process is easy. Just make sure all of the information you enter is accurate and that you *don't skip any of the required questions!*

Applications with incorrect or incomplete information are automatically rejected.

A couple of reminders: As noted above, remember that each journal must have its own website.

Additionally, each article your journal publishes should have its own URL (not just an issue URL) so that the DOAJ and third-party databases can directly link to the journal articles.

It's also important to note that you will have to *submit a separate application for each of the OA journals you publish* to prove that each journal meets the DOAJ criteria. So getting one journal indexed in the DOAJ doesn't mean that any other journal you publish will automatically be admitted.

That said, once your journal(s) are admitted into the DOAJ, you will have the option to set up automatic content deposits either on your own via the [DOAJ API](#) or via a ready-to-go journal integration from a software provider—like [Scholastica's DOAJ integration](#), which automates all DOAJ article deposits for you. So the legwork for DOAJ indexing is all upfront unless you opt to manually upload articles (we don't recommend this for time and metadata quality reasons).

You can access the DOAJ Journal Application form [here](#).

On the DOAJ application, you'll find a section on "qualifiers for the DOAJ Seal." Any OA journal that meets the basic DOAJ criteria can be included in the index, but the DOAJ only awards official DOAJ Seals to journals that fulfill these qualifiers. In order to be awarded the DOAJ seal journals must:

- Have an archival arrangement in place with an external party
- Provide permanent identifiers in the papers published
- Provide article-level metadata to DOAJ
- Embed machine-readable CC licensing information in article-level metadata
- Allow reuse and remixing of content in accordance with a CC BY, CC BY-SA or CC BY-NC license
- Have a deposit policy registered in a deposit policy directory
- Allow the author to hold the copyright without restrictions

A small percentage of journals in the DOAJ currently have the DOAJ Seal, so it's an extra quality marker to aim for.

DOAJ indexing vs publisher membership

You may see on the DOAJ website that the DOAJ is a membership organization with three membership categories: Publisher, Ordinary Member, and Sponsor. It's important to note that the publisher DOAJ

membership and the journal indexing application are two *separate* things. DOAJ membership is a way to support the DOAJ, but becoming a member does not mean that all of your journals will automatically be admitted into the DOAJ. The DOAJ states: “Being a Publisher Member does not guarantee that your journals will be included in the DOAJ. All applications are treated equally from both members and non-members.” You must have at least one journal listed in the DOAJ in order to become a publisher member.

The DOAJ application review process: What to expect

Upon submitting your DOAJ application, you’ll be taken to a confirmation screen and you will also receive a confirmation email (save this for reference!). Your application will then be assessed by the DOAJ team—you’ll receive an email when your application has been assigned to a team member for the start of review. The DOAJ team hand reviews each application for accuracy and this can take some time. While you’re waiting for a decision, be sure to check ALL of your email folders including spam. The DOAJ requires that any email it sends be replied to in a month or less—you don’t want to be rejected because you forgot to check an email folder! You can also whitelist the DOAJ email address to tell your email provider that it is a trusted sender.

If your journal is accepted into the DOAJ, you’ll receive a confirmation email with next steps. If your application is rejected for some reason, don’t worry, you can always reapply! The DOAJ will send you details on why your application was rejected and they will usually allow you to reapply within six months.

General indexing advice for the DOAJ and beyond

Overall, for the DOAJ, and any index you apply to have a journal included in, you must be sure to clearly and accurately state all required information within the application and on your journal’s website. Indexing criteria is meant to ensure journal quality, and this should be something that both the index you’re applying to and any author visiting your journal can easily verify from your journal website.

You can learn more about basic indexing best practices and how indexes process content in our free eBook *How to publish low-cost, high-quality open access journals online: Key strategies for small open access publishing programs*.



