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# Open access is worth considering

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In a recent letter, Agrawal [1] outlines his opinions on open access publishing. In it, he incorrectly conflates open-access and non-selective journals. Specifically, Agrawal [1] states that "a publication in an open-access journal only imparts [the information that it is] ‘not scientifically flawed'", and later that open-access journals provide "no stamp of rigor or potential impact". Unfortunately this is a common misconception, and we would like to set the record straight: many open-access journals are highly selective.

We compiled data on the publication policies of 31 popular open access journals in biology, medicine, ecology, evolution, and plant science (Table 1, full version with journal publication policies available at Figshare [2]). Our data reveal a diversity of policies, ranging from journals that aim to publish valid science regardless of novelty or likely impact (e.g. PLOS ONE, The PeerJ), to those that are at least as selective as the most competitive closed-access journals (e.g. PLOS Biology, BMC Biology, eLife). In total, 22 of the 31 journals in our data set apply some kind of selection based on novelty and likely impact. Many open access journals also lead their fields based on metrics such as impact factors. For example, the 1st and 5th ranked journals in ISI's 'Biology' category are both open access and highly selective (PLOS Biology and BMC Biology, with impact factors of 12.7 and 6.6 respectively), and the 2nd ranked journal in ISI's 'Zoology' category is open access and places little emphasis on percieved impact (Frotiers in Zoology, impact factor 3.9). Thus a publication in an open access journal imparts much more than the information that it is not flawed. And to the extent that impact factors can be used to estimate a publication's future citation rate [3], many open access publications should be judged at least as favourably as those in closed access journals.

We agree with Agrawal that researchers should carefully consider their options when deciding where to publish. The decision affects who will see the work, how it (and the researcher who produces it) will be judged, and the rise and fall of scientific publishing models. It is therefore important that we are all aware of journals' publishing policies and reputations, both for our own science and in our judgement of others'. This is particularly important as hiring and granting committees try to keep pace with a rapidly changing publishing landscape.

References

1. Agrawal AA. 2014. Four more reasons to be skeptical of open-access publishing. Trends Plant Sci 19:133.

2. Lanfear, Rob; Pennell, Matthew W (2014): Publication policies of 31 open access publishers in biology. figshare. http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.956240

3. Eyre-Walker A, Stoletzki N. 2013. The assessment of science: the relative merits of post-publication review, the impact factor, and the number of citations. PLoS Biol 11:e1001675.

Table 1: publication polices of 31 open-access publishers in the biological sciences, with respect to whether or not they select articles based on novelty and perceived impact. Journals are ranked by impact factor, and those without impact factors are marked ‘NA’.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Journal** | **Selection for novelty/impact** | **Impact factor** |
| PLOS Medicine | yes | 15.25 |
| PLOS Biology | yes | 12.69 |
| PLOS Genetics | yes | 8.52 |
| PLOS Pathogens | yes | 8.14 |
| BMC Biology | yes | 6.53 |
| PLOS Computational Biology | yes | 4.87 |
| Genome Biology and Evolution | yes | 4.76 |
| PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases | yes | 4.57 |
| BMC Genomics | minor | 4.40 |
| BMC Plant Biology | minor | 4.35 |
| Evolutionary applications | yes | 4.15 |
| EvoDevo | yes | 3.91 |
| Frontiers in Zoology | minor | 3.87 |
| PLOS One | no | 3.73 |
| BMC Evolutionary Biology | minor | 3.29 |
| BMC Bioinformatics | minor | 3.02 |
| Scientific Reports | no | 2.93 |
| BMC Genetics | minor | 2.81 |
| BMC Developmental Biology | minor | 2.73 |
| Biology Direct | no | 2.72 |
| Evolutionary bioinformatics | no | 1.23 |
| Ecology and Evolution | no | 1.18 |
| Applications in Plant Sciences | minor | NA |
| BMC Ecology | minor | NA |
| Ecosphere | no | NA |
| eLife | yes | NA |
| Evolution Medicine and Public Health | yes | NA |
| Frontiers in Genetics | yes | NA |
| PeerJ | no | NA |
| PLOS Currents | no | NA |
| F1000 Research | no | NA |