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1 MIN AGO EDIT

Think. Check.WRITE.Submit.

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[Think.Check.Submit](#) is an online initiative that is designed “to help researchers identify trusted journals for their research” ([thinkchecksubmit.org](#), n.d.). The cornerstone of the site is an easy-to-use checklist that has been translated into more than 30 languages, although the campaign also has posters, slides, and other resources to help get the word out about the importance of assessing journals before you choose one for your manuscript submission. Think.Check.Submit is a cross-industry initiative founded by 12 well-known organizations including the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Think.Check.Submit has been online for about four years. Its appearance on the World Wide Web would seem to coincide with the increased awareness (and concern) about predatory publishing, although the site is careful to avoid using words such as “predatory journal,”

“predatory publishing,” or similar terms that refer to deceptive publishing practices in the scholarly literature. In this regard I think they err a bit too much on the side of caution, but that’s my opinion.

Anyone who has paid attention to my writing and research in recent years (Nicoll & Chinn, 2015a), or who has heard me speak at a conference or writing retreat, knows that I am very concerned about the damage that predatory journals and publishers can wreak on the scholarly literature in nursing. Nurses have taken a leadership role in identifying the problem (INANE Predatory Publishing Collaborative, 2014), documenting, through research, that predatory journals exist in nursing (Oermann et al., 2016), describing the problems that these publications perpetuate (Oermann et al., 2018), and suggesting solutions, which range from education and mentoring, to institutional policies that include punitive actions for those who support these nefarious journals (Oermann et al., 2016; Darbyshire, 2018).

Knowing my track record, people probably think I fully support the aims of Think.Check.Submit—and I do. But I always felt like something was missing and I could never quite put my finger on it. Then it hit me—nowhere on the site do they discuss where *writing* fits into their process of thinking, checking, and submitting. It is implied, but not stated, that authors write first, then begin the process of deciding on a journal for submission, which includes an evaluation of its trustworthiness and credibility (or, thinking and checking). But authors who write before selecting a journal do themselves a disservice and may very well be setting themselves up for manuscript rejection, before their article is even submitted. Therefore, I think the correct order for the mnemonic should be Think.Check.**WRITE**.Submit, and I will tell you why.

WHY MANUSCRIPTS ARE REJECTED

I have been an editor for more than two decades and in all those years, I have met with and talked to dozens of other editors. Based on these conversations, I can say with certainty that editors reject the vast majority of manuscripts for two reasons: 1) it is not the right fit for the journal; and 2) it is not formatted correctly. I refer to these two reasons as *content* and *hygiene*. Both of these problems are easily addressed and wise authors will ensure that they do not make these mistakes when preparing and submitting manuscripts for publication. Of course, these are not the only reasons manuscripts are rejected. Certainly errors such as fatal flaws in the scientific method, inappropriate statistical analysis, or lack of institutional review board (IRB) oversight are reasons for manuscript rejection. But I suspect that the Pareto (1896/1897) principle is at work here: 80% of manuscripts are rejected for content and hygiene problems and 20% for other reasons.

JOURNAL DUE DILIGENCE

With this understanding of the reasons for potential rejection, I advise authors to be thorough in vetting a journal before they ever set pen to paper (or lay their fingers on the keyboard, in more modern parlance). I call this process “Journal Due Diligence” (Nicoll, 2012; Nicoll & Chinn, 2015b). The term comes from the banking and investment industries and refers to conducting a comprehensive analysis to determine if money is being wisely used, whether for a loan, stock purchase, or something else. In terms of a journal, the process is similar: carefully reviewing all aspects of a journal to determine if it is the right potential publication outlet (ie, “fit”) for your manuscript. Part of this assessment *must* include an evaluation of the journal’s legitimacy to ensure that it is not predatory. This is probably best done by considering the journal in the larger context of who the publisher is and the length of time that the journal has been in existence.

I compared my criteria for Journal Due Diligence (Nicoll, 2012; Nicoll & Chinn, 2015b) with the “Check” criteria on the Think.Check.Submit website and found quite a bit of overlap. This is reassuring as it serves as evidence that those of us who provide authorial guidance are all on the same wavelength. However, I will say upfront that a key point, which I think is essential for evaluation and which is not included on the Think.Check.Submit checklist, is a statement about the journal’s mission and purpose and its intended audience. Without evaluating this information, how can you even begin to determine if your proposed article will be the right “fit” for the journal that you are reviewing? These items are right at the top of my checklist. If the audience does not include nurses or if the mission/purpose is not congruent with what you are writing, then you probably can just end your evaluation of this particular journal at this point, and move on to the next one.

With that caveat, these are the areas of congruence between my Journal Due Diligence checklist and the “Check” criteria at the Think.Check.Submit website.

- Journal familiarity
 - Do you know the journal? Do your colleagues?
 - Have you read articles in this journal?
 - Is the Table of Contents for recent and past issues easily accessible?
- Editor and Editorial Board
 - Is the Editor clearly identified?
 - Are the members of the Editorial Board clearly identified?
 - Are there any familiar names (ie, leaders in the specialty)?
 - Is contact information for key people (editor at a minimum) provided?
- Publisher information

- Publisher name and contact information should be easily identifiable on the website.
- Evaluation of the publisher: Is this a well-known, established company?
- Peer review processes
 - Clearly identified and described?
- Indexing and discoverability
 - Where are articles indexed?
 - Are archival processes described or evident (ie, back issues of the journal are available on the journal website)?
- Fees for publishing
 - Are there any fees to publish in the journal?
 - If so, are they clearly identified by amount and when the fees are to be paid?

Because I advise authors to evaluate a journal before writing a manuscript, I also include information about manuscript preparation on my due diligence checklist. These items are not on the Think.Check.Submit list, but I think they are important. You should review and identify:

- Is a link to the Information for Authors included at the journal website?
 - When reviewing this document, does it provide clear, comprehensive guidance on how to prepare your manuscript?
- Manuscript length specified (in words or pages)?
 - What is included in the length (text, references, tables, abstract)?
- Abstract required?

- If yes, what is the length and format?
- Manuscript formatting requirements (such as margins or fonts)
- References
 - Citation style for references identified (APA, AMA or something else)?
 - Is there a limit on the number of references?
- Title page requirements
- Is a cover letter required?
- Is a copyright transfer form required?
 - If yes, when does it need to be submitted?
- How is the manuscript submitted?

Think.Check.Submit includes this question (which I do not): “Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative?” and they give several examples. Since the site is a cross-industry initiative, I understand why this question is on the list. The information is important but ferreting it out on a journal website might not be terribly easy, especially for someone who is not super-familiar with evaluating journals and their websites. I would encourage you to try your best to find the answer to this question, but don’t let it become a barrier to choosing/not choosing a journal for your article submission.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, my Journal Due Diligence process corresponds closely with the thinking and checking steps of the Think.Check.Submit website. This is a positive finding, although I would submit that my process is more detailed and comprehensive than what they provide. Since I tell authors to do this evaluation and select a journal before they begin writing, I believe that the word **WRITE**

should be prominently inserted, after Check and before Submit, in the Think.Check.Submit mnemonic. By understanding what is needed to carefully evaluate a journal before writing and then submitting an article, you can have confidence that you are ticking the boxes to ensure that your article is the right fit (content), properly formatted (hygiene), and not falling into the hands of a predatory publisher.

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Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN lives in Maine with her husband, three rescue pets, and two adult children close by. She keeps herself busy as Editor-in-Chief of *Nurse Author & Editor*, and *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*. She provides advice and consultation to both novice and experienced authors who want to publish in the scholarly literature. Two days per week she works at the Portland Community Free Clinic. [Click here to send a message](#) directly to Leslie.

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