

Correspondence

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Competing interests

The author is the head of Research Integrity and Open Science at UniLaSalle, France, and has volunteer roles on Editorial Board of *Chemical Geology*, *Results in Geochemistry*, *Sustainability and Geochemical Journal*, and is an advisor of the Earth and Environmental Science Community Gateway from Open Research Europe.

Stop paying to be published Open Access – a French perspective

Olivier Pourret ✉

UniLaSalle, Aghyle, Beauvais, France

olivier.pourret@unilasalle.fr

orcid.org/0000-0001-6181-6079



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“How can I pay to publish my work open access?” Like some of you,¹ I get asked this question almost every week. Indeed, many authors restrict their choice of an Open Access (OA) journal to those with Article Processing Charges (APC).

I recommend that they publish in a journal with no APC (‘diamond’ OA journal) or a non-OA journal and make the peer reviewed manuscript or accepted author manuscript (AAM) OA through a repository (‘green’ OA). In some cases, a journal with low and affordable APC may also be suitable. I propose this in accordance with the French national open science policy, which clearly asks that scientific articles must be available OA and encourages its research community to turn to free publication models for both authors and readers.

Many authors restrict their OA journal choice to those with APC, mainly due to these two factors:²

(i) Their need to publish in historically prestigious journals. Although the majority of renowned journals are still paywalled, they now provide an option in which authors can pay APCs to make their work OA.

(ii) Their need for visibility. The argument goes that OA is nice but pointless if no one knows about it. Despite its flaws, well-known historical paywalled journals have a high level of visibility, allowing potential readers to learn about their work.

In reality, green OA allows authors to self-archive their papers in an open archive, and it does not cost anything.

Even if a research contract sometimes allows funding to be used to pay for APCs, I urge the research community not to pay to publish an article in one of these hybrid journals.

It would be like paying twice, the so-called double-dipping. The recommended and free solution for the authors is to deposit their manuscripts in an open archive such as HAL in France. It is therefore possible for authors to publish for free in hybrid journals.

Whether the journal is hybrid or fully OA, this system has many flaws. It replaces inequality in access to results with inequality in the ability to publish. This also implies that paying would be enough to get published, which potentially discredits published research. It promotes unnecessary publication for those who have funding. It also fuels the development of ‘predatory’ scientific publishing, multiplying dubious or even fraudulent journals, and discredits scientific production in general. Eventually, it participates in the inflation of costs. There is no reason to pay a ‘prestige tax’ to be published.³

French national policy invites those who publish in paywalled journals to deposit their AAM as soon as it is published. If the journal does not allow it, the AAM may be deposited in an open archive with a delay (embargo). The Rights Retention Strategy, developed by the cOAlition S, makes it even possible to publish AAM without embargo. I therefore recommend resorting to this strategy.

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