

UC Santa Cruz

Publishing Tips Series Season 2

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Season 2, Week 2 - Journal vs. Publisher

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Publishing Tips Series – Season 2, Week 2

October 30, 2025

This is the second week of the Publishing Tips Series, Season 2, and this second season runs from October 23 to December 4, 2025. This week's episode covers "**Journal vs. Publisher.**" Here are this week's takeaways:

- The journal and the publisher are different entities, and knowing who both are will allow you to direct your questions to the one who can best help.

Spotify link to listen

[Season 2, Week 2 podcast episode](#) (same content as the following text-based version, only in audio format)

Journal vs. Publisher

Wendy Belcher, author of [Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks](#), states in her book that, "...identifying an appropriate journal for submitting your work is essential." I would add that at least knowing – and possibly even weighing – the publisher is informative as well.

You may be wondering, Why is it important to know the distinction between my journal and publisher? Let's be real: the journal, not the publisher, is what you will prioritize when deciding where to publish. But when you choose a journal, you are also choosing a publisher, and the publisher does influence the process. Publishers and journals each determine your experience as an author in different ways. It is also useful to consider whom – the journal or the publisher – to ask a question.

Let's look at these two entities – journals and publishers – through the eyes of the fictional character Maya, a graduate student in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The names and discipline in this story are not the important parts but rather what happens on this publishing journey and how Maya goes about it are key. This story aims to make the journal/publisher distinction more tangible!

Starting out publishing an article

Maya has co-written an article on banana slugs and mushrooms in the *Amanita* family and is ready to submit it to a journal. She has identified the journal *Fungal Ecology*, but why?

From a disciplinary perspective, *Fungal Ecology* is the venue where experts in her area of study publish, and it is affiliated with the The British Mycological Society. Having an article in this journal will reach the readers interested in her findings. This journal may be aspirational, but Maya has previously published one other research article in the open access journal [California Agriculture](#) so she has some experience with publishing. Given the readership of *Fungal Ecology* and its really good Impact Factor of 2.2, publishing there would be great for her career. Maya, her advisor Neal, and their co-author Pat agree together that it would be worthwhile to submit their article there.

Nevertheless, Maya sees that the publisher is Elsevier, about which she has heard mixed reviews. She knows it is a giant commercial publisher with huge profits, that some authors disagree with their policies, and that UC even previously broke their subscription to Elsevier for a time when they couldn't agree on terms (read more on [why UC did so](#) and [the current agreement](#)). Despite these issues, she believes that it would be advantageous to her to have an article in this journal specifically.

Preparing to submit and considering open access

While looking at the journal's guide for authors and open access options, Maya sees that it may cost money to publish in *Fungal Ecology* if she wants to publish open access (OA). This is because *Fungal Ecology* is a hybrid journal, meaning that some articles are openly available for anyone on the internet to read but others are behind a paywall. The publisher charges author fees, instead of reading or subscription fees, for the open access articles in order to cover costs and make a profit from publishing it. As Maya studies the [journal's page on open access and subscription options](#), she wonders which is more important: readers being able to access her article or the cost since she does not have funding for the fee as a graduate student? Her earlier article was OA, but the journal fortunately did not charge a fee, which is also known as diamond open access.

The upside is that Maya has options. It is good to know whether the journal charges an OA fee and how she will pay it early on so that if her article is accepted, Maya does not have to withdraw it owing to not being able to pay. One option, though, is finding another journal, but Maya is pretty set on this one. Another option is publishing subscription, meaning traditionally behind a paywall, for no fee and relying on the University of California's Open Access Policies to share her accepted manuscript (should her article be accepted!) openly in a repository, such as [eScholarship](#).

A third option involves the UC Libraries' open access publishing agreements. These agreements are publisher-specific, and the UC Libraries negotiate them with publishers who can

support open access. The terms of these agreements vary, but they generally cover some portion of the OA charges or provide a discount to help authors publish open access directly with the publisher.

When Maya looks up the journal title in UC's [Journal Open Access Lookup Tool \(JOLT\)](#) to find out if the Library has an agreement with the publisher Elsevier for the journal *Fungal Ecology*, she finds that *Fungal Ecology* is part of this agreement with Elsevier. The terms are that the first \$1,000 of the OA fee is covered automatically. Authors without funds can receive full coverage of the Article Processing Charge (APC). This is good news to Maya. When she clicks on the full details of the Elsevier agreement in JOLT, she reads that she has to be the corresponding author and it needs to be a full length article in order to receive funding. She meets both of those criteria.

Knowing both that this is a good journal in her field and that she could publish open access with the support of the UC Libraries cements Maya's choice of this journal.

Submitting and peer review

Now that Maya is sure about this journal for many reasons, she submits her article through Elsevier's author portal, where she will see the status of her submission going forward. Since she did the majority of the data gathering, Maya and her co-authors mutually agreed that she would be first author of this article and could also serve as the corresponding author (more on this next week!).

After the article goes through peer review, she receives a decision of revise and resubmit with major revisions from the journal editor (for more on decisions during the publishing process, see [week/episode 3 of Season 1](#)). Despite this hurdle, she is determined to be published, and spends a month working on the revisions with her advisor and other co-author.

After resubmitting and going through another round of peer review, the editor accepts her article!

Publishing agreement and production

Upon acceptance, Maya is asked to sign an agreement or contract with the publisher to publish her article. The contract is with Elsevier as the publisher, and Elsevier refers to this contract as the journal publishing agreement. Since she is publishing open access and the UC Libraries are paying for it, she will also have to sign a license agreement.

Because her article will be open access, Maya signs an agreement that gives Elsevier nonexclusive rights to publish it. This means that she retains her copyright, instead of signing over exclusive rights to the publisher. Additionally, for licensing, she will choose from one of two options for Creative Commons licenses, which give readers greater rights for reusing her article.

Since she is co-authoring with her advisor Neal and a researcher at another institution Pat, she shares [Elsevier's copyright information](#) with them, too.

Her co-authors are relieved because they prefer to retain copyright as well. They decide together on the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\) license](#) so that there are fewer restrictions on reuse. Since one of her co-authors wants to include the article as a book chapter in an edited volume about mushrooms in California, they believe this licensing will help clear the way to do so.

Publication

Once their article is published openly on the journal's webpage on Elsevier's Science Direct platform, the authors have a DOI for sharing and citing their article. Since they still hold their rights and licensed it openly as CC BY, they don't go back to the publisher Elsevier for permission to re-publish it in a book. The article, through Elsevier, is indexed in many databases, such as Web of Science, so people begin citing the article.

Wrapping up

Many authors think about the publisher's policies after the fact – usually after their article is accepted and they realize there is an OA fee or that they will be asked to sign over their copyright – but being proactive about finding out which publisher manages the journal early in the process can be useful for making decisions, knowing what to expect, and asking questions.

Putting it into practice

Each week we will have a few things to read or try. For this week:

1. Read about journal and author metrics, like the Journal Impact Factor and h-index, to understand ways that journals (and authors) are evaluated for things like prestige, and consider how you would evaluate a journal to decide whether to submit your article there.
2. Go to the website for a journal that you read or want to publish in, and identify who the publisher is. Look at their policies and information about copyright, open access, AI, and more. Consider whether the policies would work for you (or not).

More questions? Contact the Library at research@library.ucsc.edu or [sign up](#) for a one-on-one Zoom meeting about publishing.

Talk with you next week about what being a corresponding author involves! Spoiler: you have responsibilities throughout the publishing process and beyond.

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