



ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Bentham Open

Date of Review: May 15, 2009

Composite Score:

★ 3/4

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Pricing Options

PUBLICATION FEES

Bentham Open uses the author fee model to support its Open Access journals. Before an article or review is published, the author is charged a fee according to this schedule:

Letters:	\$600
Research Articles:	\$800
Mini-Review Articles:	\$600
Review Articles:	\$900
Book Reviews:	\$450

MEMBERSHIP FEES

The site offers both individual and institutional memberships. The only benefit of membership is a discount on the publication fees Bentham Open charges to publish an article in one of its journals. For the institutional membership, all researchers affiliated with the institution receive the discount. Members can choose to pay a higher membership fee to receive a greater discount.

<i>Individual Membership</i>	<i>Discount</i>
<i>Fee (U.S. \$)</i>	<i>(off publication fees)</i>
\$1,600	5%
\$2,400	10%
\$3,200	15%
\$4,000	20%
\$4,800	25%

<i>Institutional Membership</i>	<i>Discount</i>
<i>Fee (U.S. \$)</i>	<i>(off publication fees)</i>
\$ 2,200	5%
\$ 4,400	10%
\$ 6,600	15%
\$ 8,800	20%
\$11,000	25%

Because the journals on the site are Open Access, there is no fee for viewing or downloading them.

Product Description

Bentham Open is a Web site that makes available 236 Open Access, peer-reviewed, online journals. The journals cover a wide range of subjects within the STM (science, technology, and medicine) fields as well as within the social sciences. Most of the journal titles begin with the phrase “The Open” or just “Open” as in The Open Business Journal, and this convention makes for a few awkward titles, such as the Open Heart Failure Journal. Most of the journals started in 2007 or 2008, and each calendar year corresponds to a volume. For ex-

ample, for The Open Neurology Journal, volume 1, is for 2007; volume 2 is for 2008; and volume 3 is for 2009. In this specific case, volume 1 contains only a single article, volume 2 has twelve articles, and volume 3 has five articles (so far). The page for each journal links to an Editorial Advisory Board, and the board for The Open Neurology Journal lists 74 members, a typical number. Most of the journals have very large editorial boards. Members are listed using only their first initial followed by their surname and country, for example, “C. Hall (USA).” The Open Neurology Journal lists an Editor-in-Chief, but many of the journals on the site do not name an editor.

Bentham Open is a division of Bentham Science Publishers, a for-profit company headquartered, apparently, in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. The company’s Web site <<http://www.bentham.org/open/index.htm>> provides very little information about the company itself but does list representatives in the United States, Europe, and Asia, in addition to its main office in Sharjah. Bentham Open is similar to other Open Access journal sites that have appeared recently, including the Hindawi Publishing Corporation <<http://www.hindawi.com/journals/>> and World Scientific <<http://www.worldscientific.com/>>. Typically, these publishers offer large numbers of Open Access, online journal titles. Most have appeared only within the past few years, and they follow the “author fee” model for Open Access publishing, often charging hefty fees. STM lends itself to the author fee model because of the disciplines’ competitive nature and because researchers can allocate and use grant money for the author fees.

Bentham Open journals are all Open Access; articles on the site are licensed with the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License, the terms of which permit copying and distribution. Authors retain the copyright to their work. The site is supported by fees charged to the author upon publication of an article, and the fees are high. The author fee model in itself is not necessarily bad; the reputable Public Library of Science (PLOS) journals uses the same model. The PLOS journal Biology has a publication fee of \$2,850, which is much higher than the fees Bentham Open charges, but PLOS does offer a fee waiver/reduction program in cases of financial need. The Bentham Open site makes no mention of such a program, but in response to an e-mail inquiry, a representative stated that authors from developing countries are granted a discount of 30 to 50 percent off the publication fee charges.

The articles in this site benefit from the external indexing available for Open Access, online journals. For example, Bentham Open content is crawled by Google and Google Scholar and is searchable there. Librarians have dutifully created CONSER MARC records for most of the titles in the collection, and many libraries have uploaded these records into their online catalogs. The Serials Solutions MARC 360 Updates product includes records for Bentham Open journals, so li-

braries using this service can “track” these Open Access journals and receive the records for uploading into their catalogs. Also, Bentham Open journals are listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals, and articles from some of the medical journals in the collection are mirrored on the PubMed Central site. The indexing, the Open Access directory listing, the MARC records, and the journal tracking afforded Bentham Open’s journals all function as essentially free advertising for the Bentham Science Publishers company, the publisher of the Bentham Open journals.

SEARCHING

The site has given very little thought or effort to making its content easily findable. Bentham Open offers an A to Z list of all the 236 journals it offers. Users do a lot of mouse clicking—up to six clicks—to get from the A to Z list to the PDF file that contains the article they seek.

The site offers a simple search box to search its article content, and the box is created using Google Custom search. Bentham Open offers no advanced search. Some, but not all, of the content is indexed in Google and Google Scholar, so users may find it easier to search there than on the site itself.

Critical Evaluation

The site states that, “All submitted articles undergo a fast but rigorous peer-review procedure, followed by prompt submission of an article for publication.” However, the journals contain articles that take unpopular views on topics and were likely unacceptable in mainstream journals. An example is the article entitled, “Cosmological Constraints on Unifying Dark Fluid Models”¹ that appears in *The Open Astronomy Journal*. The article offers the dark fluid model as an alternative to the widely-accepted theories establishing dark matter and dark energy in cosmology; it states:

In the standard model of cosmology, dark matter and dark energy are presently the two main contributors to the total energy in the Universe. However, these two dark components are still of unknown nature, and many alternative explanations are possible. We consider here the so-called unifying dark fluid models, which replace dark energy and dark matter by a unique dark fluid with specific properties.

Because the dark fluid theory is not accepted by mainstream cosmologists, it is likely that if this article were submitted to any mainstream journal it would be rejected, and the author sought to publish it here because of the less-rigorous or façade-like peer-review process. Alternatively, the author submitted the article to Bentham Open because he knew that merely by paying the fee he could get his work published. Alternative ideas in science can have value, but journal editors need to make a distinction between alternative viewpoints worthy and not worthy of publication, and publishers must not abandon legitimate peer-review just to achieve the goal of making research Open Access. In many cases, Bentham Open journals publish articles that no legitimate peer-review journal would accept, and unconventional and non-conformist ideas are being presented in some of them as legitimate science. A site such as Bentham Open that offers a large number of titles can encounter a problem: if one of the titles earns a reputation for low quality, it sullies the reputation of all the other titles in the collection.

Another example comes from *The Open Chemical Physics Journal*. In the article “Active Thermite Material Discovered in Dust from

the 9/11 World Trade Center Catastrophe,”² the authors conclude that some of the dust found in the World Trade Center debris is unexploded bomb material. They lead the reader to conclude that planted explosives were the real source of the World Trade Center buildings’ collapse, and not the aircraft that struck them. This article has helped fuel 9/11 conspiracy theories. Thus, Bentham Open is a place for people to publish their theories, theses, and ideas that are out of the mainstream.

There is no journal impact factor data for these journals because the data takes three years to compile and all the journals Bentham Open offers are less than three years old. In response to an e-mail inquiry regarding rejection rates for Bentham Open journals, company representative Mehwish Akhter replied, “Rejection rate is different for different journals. Normally it’s 25–30%.”³

The membership plan that Bentham Open Access offers is highly questionable, especially the individual membership. The cheapest individual membership is \$1,600, and at this rate an author receives a 5 percent discount on author fees. For an article that costs \$800 to publish, the discount is \$40; to break even at that membership level, an author would need to publish 40 articles. Clearly, very little thought has been put into Bentham’s membership plan; it appears only to be a way to generate revenue for the company from the naive.

The Open Access model is a good one, for it makes research freely available to everyone. However, Bentham Open is exploiting the good will of those who established the Open Access model by twisting it and exploiting it for profit. Just because a journal is Open Access doesn’t make it legitimate or high quality.

OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS, AUTHOR FEES, AND JOURNAL QUALITY

As the number of Open Access journals increases, scholars are beginning to discuss the idea of journal quality and the author fee model for supporting Open Access journals. Online journals obviously represent a large change in academic publishing. Arms states:

Historically, the cost of printing acted as a barrier; publishers played a vital role in validating materials and provided purchasers with a basic level of quality control. On the Web, the barriers are very low; anybody can be an author and anybody can be a publisher.⁴

Other writers agree. It’s easy to appear legitimate on the internet. Michael Nenevich adds:

Layout and appearance may be misleading in the WWW, as it is easy to copy and to make something appear a professional site. Also the Internet address is not always telling, as it is relatively easy to buy domain names. Hence, origin and quality are not immediately perceptible. What is then a trusted source? While previously, you had to be in command of a relatively expensive apparatus (a publishing house) to produce scholarly publications, this is no longer the case in the digital age. Academia will have to cope with this by quality labelling (as previously discussed) or trusted source collections which would allow the academic reader to do research in a trusted environment.⁵

Librarians will continue to make quality distinctions and judgments about information resources just as they have always done. In the past, collection development librarians decided whether to acquire a particular journal or not. In the context of Open Access resources, the



Bentham Open Review Scores Composite: ★ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content:



The site has over 200 online, Open Access journals, but many have only a few articles in them. Many articles are of questionable quality and likely not publishable in mainstream journals.

Searchability:



The site offers very poor search functionality. Users can access the journals by clicking through an A to Z list, and there is a simple search box that uses Google Custom Search. There is no Advanced Search functionality available.

Price:



The content is Open Access, so the price evaluation is based on the fees charged to authors whose articles are accepted for publication. The author fees are high; for example, the publisher charges \$450 just to publish a book review. The membership fees are very expensive and offer little benefit.

Contract:



The site's content is Open Access and it licenses its articles with a Creative Commons Attribution—Noncommercial 3.0 Unported license. The site also states "Authors publishing with Bentham Open retain the copyright to their work."

quality distinctions will involve including (or excluding) Open Access titles in a library's online catalog, electronic resource management module, and other systems where libraries present resources to their users. This role will greatly add value to information found in libraries, for "Readers of academic publications seek instruments to unburden them from filtering through everything published in the field of enquiry."⁵ Now, in many cases, the collection development librarian's job will be specifically include the task of excluding burdensome, low-quality resources from library discovery systems.

The world of scholarly communication remains undecided on the author fee model of financing research publication. Ultimately, the model that works best will vary by discipline. Depending on one's perspective, charging an author to publish an article may be good or bad. If you are a consumer of scholarly literature, it is certainly a benefit not to have to pay journal subscription fees. However, if you are an author, it may seem unfair that you actually have to pay to have your research published.

Speaking against the "author pays" model, Crispin Davis, the CEO of Reed Elsevier said, "if you are receiving potential payment for every article submitted, there is an inherent conflict of interest that could threaten the quality of the peer review system."⁶ Indeed, Mc-

Cabe and Snyder state, "Good articles provide a reader benefit; bad articles do not. Readers cannot tell the quality of articles prior to reading them, and reading an article requires an effort cost."⁷ Here again, these statements bring to mind the role of the collection development librarian in making resource selection decisions that benefit library users. In addition, they offer a new perspective on the high subscription costs of journals published by companies like Reed Elsevier. Perhaps the consistent high quality their journals bring justifies the high subscription prices after all. Given the increasing number of Open Access STM journals, scholars need a reliable means of finding only the research worth reading.

Bentham Open's emergence into scholarly publishing in 2007 has served mainly as a venue to publish research of questionable quality. The site has exploited the Open Access model for its own financial motives and flooded scholarly communication with a flurry of low quality and questionable research. By linking to sites such as Bentham Open, libraries are diluting scholarly research and making it more difficult for scholars to sort through the abundance of journal articles available.

Contract Provisions and Authentication

The site has no Terms of Service page. The only mention of any contract is the Creative Commons license under which the articles are made available. Authors retain copyright on their works.

No authentication is needed. The content is Open Access.

Notes

1. Arbey, A. (2008). Cosmological Constraints on Unifying Dark Fluid Models. *The Open Astronomy Journal* 1 p. 27–38.
2. Harrit, Neils H. et al. (2009). Active Thermic Material Discovered in Dust from the 9/11 World Trade Center Catastrophe. *The Open Chemical Physics Journal* 2 p. 7–31.

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3. Akhter, Mehwish. (2008). E-mail correspondence.
4. Arms, William Y. (2002). What Are the Alternatives to Peer Review? Quality Control in Scholarly Publishing on the Web. *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 8(1). Online: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0008.103>>.
5. Nentwich, Michael. (2005). Quality Control in Academic Publishing: Challenges in the Age of Cyberscience. *Poiesis and Praxis* 3(3), p. 181–198.
6. Davis, Crispin (2004). Quoted in: Great Britain. House of Commons. *Scientific Publications Free for All?* House of Commons Papers, Session 2003–04/399. London: Stationery Office.
7. McCabe, Mark J., and Snyder, Christopher. M. (2005). Open Access and Academic Journal Quality. *American Economic Review*. 95(2), p. 453–459.

About the Author

Jeffrey Beall is Metadata Librarian at Auraria Library, University of Colorado, Denver. He earned his M.S.L.S. degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an M.A. in English from Oklahoma State University. He has worked as an academic librarian for 18 years. His research and articles have been published in numerous journals including *American Libraries*, *College and Research Libraries*, and *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*. ■