Biointerface Research in Applied Chemistry
Open-Access Journal (ISSN: 2069-5837)

Editorial
Volume 16, Issue 3, 2026, 71
https://doi.org/10.33263/BRIAC163.071

Broken Links, Broken Symmetry? Reflections on Technical Formalism and Evaluative Reciprocity

Alexandru Mihai Grumezescu [1,*]

[1] Department of Science and Engineering of Oxide Materials and Nanomaterials, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnologies, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, 1-7 Gheorghe Polizu Street, 011061 Bucharest, Romania; agrumezescu@upb.ro (A.M.G.);
[2] Research Institute of the University of Bucharest, University of Bucharest, 90 Panduri Street, 050663 Bucharest, Romania
* Correspondence: agrumezescu@upb.ro (A.M.G.);

Received: 30.04.2026; Accepted: 1.05.2026; Published: 1.05.2026

Preamble

In three recent editorials, I reflected on the evolving architecture of scholarly evaluation and the asymmetries that may emerge when standards, procedures, and infrastructures do not operate with sufficient consistency across comparable cases.

In “Rigor or Symmetry? Reflections on Fifteen Years of Diamond Open Access” https://doi.org/10.33263/BRIAC161.001, I examined how journals operating under non-commercial, Diamond Open Access models may encounter increasingly demanding technical and formal thresholds, while journals incorporated under earlier evaluative frameworks may continue to benefit from historical positioning.

In “Consistency or Contingency? Reflections on Uncertainty in Editorial Triage” https://doi.org/10.33263/LIANBS151.001, I considered the variability that may arise when similar technical conditions receive different levels of attention across comparable evaluation processes.

In “Consistency or Context? Reflections on Indexing, Evaluation, and Temporal Validity” https://doi.org/10.33263/BRIAC162.070, I addressed the conceptual tension that emerges when the same body of scholarly content appears to occupy different evaluative positions depending on timing, database architecture, or procedural context.

The present reflection continues this discussion from a further perspective: not the journal’s infrastructure, not the archive being evaluated, and not the retrospective expansion of indexed content, but the infrastructure of evaluation itself.

More specifically, it considers what happens when a technical imperfection arises not in the applicant's journal but within the evaluator’s own submission environment.

The Evaluator’s Interface

During a recent journal evaluation submission, the final summary step of the online application interface displayed the completed stages of the process: ISSN check, language, journal details, access information, contact information, and summary. At the bottom of the interface, under an “Important Note,” applicants were informed that journals submitted with incomplete access information would not be evaluated.

Immediately below this notice, the platform directed applicants seeking additional information to read a Journal Selection Essay**,** presented as a descriptive resource explaining the evaluation process (Figure 1).

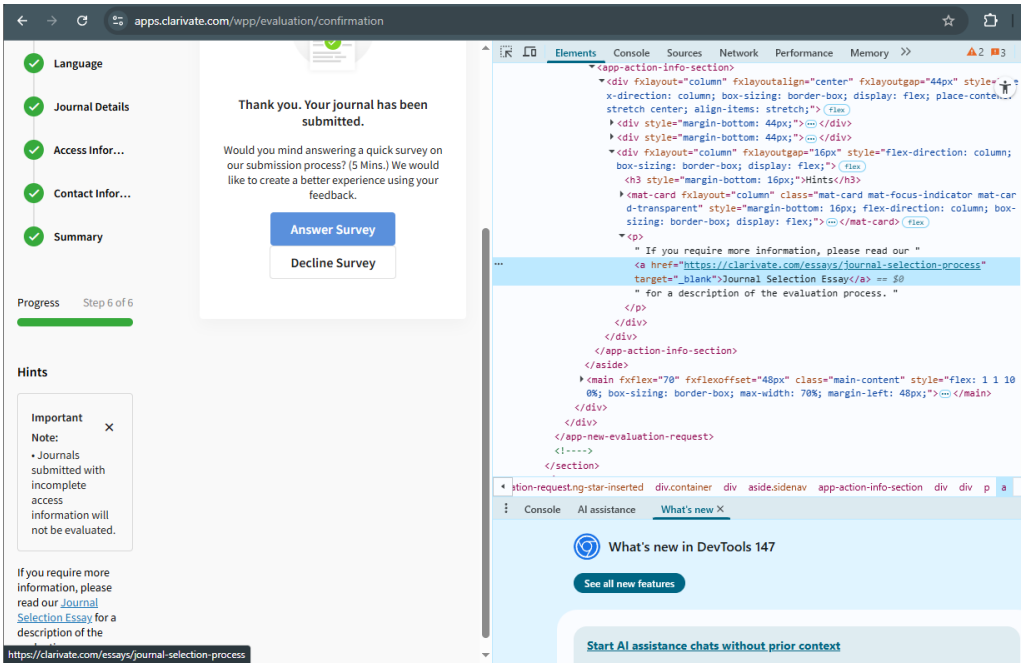

Figure 1. Screenshot of the final stage of the journal evaluation workflow, showing the official sidebar hint directing users to the *Journal Selection Essay*. The browser developer tools highlight the embedded hyperlink target, https://clarivate.com/essays/journal-selection-process, documenting the exact URL provided by the evaluation platform for further information on the journal selection process.

However, when the link was accessed, it led not to the referenced explanatory document, but to a page displaying the message**:** "Sorry, the page you're looking for can't be found."

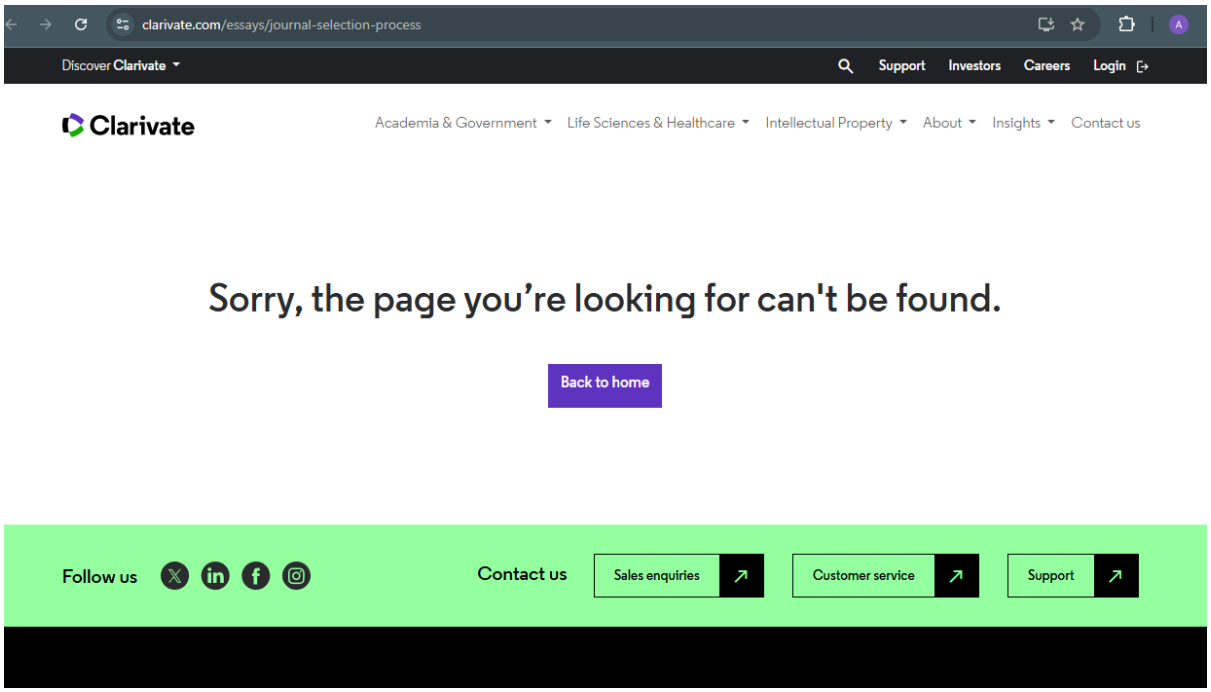

Figure 2. Screenshot of the webpage reached through the *Journal Selection Essay* link provided in the submission interface, displaying a "page can't be found" message instead of the referenced explanatory resource.

The observation is simple. A link embedded in the official evaluation submission interface, intended to guide applicants through the journal selection process, did not resolve to the expected page.

In ordinary digital environments, such occurrences are neither extraordinary nor scandalous. Pages migrate. URLs change. Redirects fail. Content is reorganized. Documentation is updated, moved, or temporarily unavailable. A broken link, by itself, does not necessarily indicate institutional negligence, procedural invalidity, or lack of seriousness.

Indeed, it may represent nothing more than a correctable technical oversight.

And precisely for that reason, it is worth reflecting upon.

Correctable Imperfections

Contemporary scholarly evaluation increasingly relies on technical signals. Website architecture, metadata consistency, DOI functionality, ethical guideline links, access clarity, publisher identification, contact transparency, and registry alignment have become integral components of editorial assessment.

There is nothing inherently unreasonable about this development. Digital scholarly communication depends on traceability, stability, discoverability, and transparency. Technical infrastructure is no longer peripheral to publishing; it is part of the scholarly record.

The difficulty begins when correctable technical imperfections are treated differently depending on where they occur.

When a journal's website contains a non-functional link, the error may be interpreted as evidence of insufficient editorial control. When a DOI temporarily fails to resolve, the problem may be read as a weakness in digital infrastructure. When metadata are inconsistent across registries, the discrepancy may become a signal of inadequate formal alignment. When ethical guideline links are incomplete or outdated, the omission may affect the outcome of Editorial Triage.

Each of these observations may be legitimate.

But legitimacy does not eliminate the question of proportionality.

If a correctable technical defect in an applicant journal can stop evaluation before substantive assessment begins, what should be concluded when a correctable technical defect appears within the evaluator's own application environment?

The answer should not be punitive. It should be reflective.

Reciprocity, Not Reversal

The purpose of this observation is not to reverse the evaluative gaze in a retaliatory manner. It is not to suggest that a broken link in an evaluation platform invalidates the evaluation system. Nor is it to imply that the same severity applied to applicant journals should mechanically be applied back to evaluators.

Such an approach would merely reproduce the formalism under discussion.

Rather, the case illustrates a more fundamental point: technical imperfection is a normal feature of complex digital systems. If this is acknowledged for large infrastructures, it should also be acknowledged, proportionately, for journals whose deficiencies are formal, remediable, and not directly related to the integrity of their scientific content.

The issue is not whether links should work. They should.

The issue is not whether documentation should be accessible. It should.

The issue is not whether applicant journals should maintain coherent, transparent, and reliable infrastructures. They should.

The issue is whether technical imperfections are interpreted with the same conceptual tolerance across the ecosystem.

A broken link in an evaluator's platform is likely to be understood as an administrative oversight. A broken link in a journal under evaluation may be interpreted as a structural deficiency.

This difference in interpretation is the core problem.

The Asymmetry of Meaning

In scholarly evaluation, technical errors do not merely exist; they are assigned meaning.

For some actors, a technical defect is a temporary inconvenience. For others, it becomes an evaluative signal. For large infrastructures, imperfection is often absorbed into the normal maintenance cycle of digital systems. For small or independently sustained journals, imperfection may become evidence of insufficient professionalism.

The same type of error may therefore acquire different significance depending on the institutional position of the actor in which it appears.

This is not simply an operational inconsistency. It is an asymmetry of meaning.

A non-functional link does not change its technical nature depending on whether it appears on a journal website or on an evaluation platform. Yet its consequences may differ substantially. In one context, it may be repaired. In another, it may contribute to rejection, delay, or the requirement to restart a lengthy evaluation cycle.

When such asymmetries accumulate, procedural trust is affected.

Applicants may reasonably ask whether evaluation systems distinguish sufficiently between essential deficiencies and remediable imperfections. They may also ask whether the opportunity to correct formal issues is distributed consistently, or whether correction is available more readily to established infrastructures than to those seeking recognition.

Technical Formalism and Procedural Fairness

Technical rigor is necessary. Without stable links, reliable metadata, functional identifiers, accessible policies, and transparent editorial information, scholarly communication becomes fragile. A journal that cannot maintain its basic infrastructure cannot fully support long-term academic trust.

But technical rigor must be accompanied by procedural fairness.

A system that identifies correctable errors should also possess a mechanism for proportionate correction. Not every defect requires rejection. Not every broken link indicates systemic failure. Not every metadata discrepancy reflects editorial negligence. Not every temporary technical problem justifies restarting an entire evaluation process.

There is a difference between a deficiency that compromises scholarly integrity and an imperfection that requires maintenance.

Editorial triage should be capable of distinguishing between the two.

Otherwise, technical evaluation risks becoming less a tool for quality assurance than a filter of infrastructural privilege. Journals supported by large publishers, extensive technical teams, and integrated digital systems are better positioned to maintain continuous formal

perfection. Independent journals, especially those operating under non-commercial models, may face higher relative burdens in achieving the same level of technical polish.

The result is not necessarily better science.

It may simply be smoother infrastructure.

Documentation as an Evaluative Standard

There is an additional irony when the non-functional link concerns documentation intended to explain the evaluation process itself.

Applicants are expected to understand and comply with criteria whose interpretation may be complex, evolving, and highly consequential. Guidance documents are therefore not marginal. They are part of procedural transparency.

If an evaluation platform directs applicants to an explanatory resource, that resource becomes part of the fairness architecture of the process. Its accessibility matters because it helps applicants understand expectations, avoid omissions, and align their submissions with required standards.

When such a link fails, the issue is not merely technical. It touches the accessibility of evaluative reasoning.

Again, the conclusion is not that the evaluator has failed its own standards. Rather, the conclusion is that even sophisticated evaluation infrastructures depend on the same fragile digital mechanisms that applicant journals are expected to maintain flawlessly.

This shared vulnerability should encourage proportionality.

Double Measure

A double standard does not necessarily arise from the existence of different rules. It may arise from the unequal consequences attached to similar imperfections.

If a broken link is a remediable oversight in one context but a sign of non-compliance in another, the standard is no longer purely technical. It becomes positional.

If temporary digital instability is tolerated within large infrastructures but treated as decisive within smaller ones, rigor becomes asymmetric.

If applicants are expected to interpret every technical requirement strictly, while the infrastructure guiding that interpretation contains its own correctable defects, procedural credibility depends on whether such defects are acknowledged with the same seriousness and proportionality.

The problem, therefore, is not the broken link itself.

The problem is what the broken link reveals.

It reveals that digital systems are imperfect. It reveals that maintenance is continuous. It reveals that documentation can shift, interfaces can lag behind, and technical environments can contain inconsistencies even when administered by major organizations.

Most importantly, it reveals that the scholarly publishing ecosystem should be cautious before converting every correctable imperfection into an exclusionary signal.

From Perfection to Proportionality

Evaluation systems should not abandon technical standards. On the contrary, those standards are indispensable.

But standards should be applied with a sense of proportion. A technical issue should be assessed according to its severity, persistence, relevance, and relation to scholarly integrity. A temporarily broken link should not be treated in the same manner as a fabricated peer review. A metadata inconsistency outside the direct control of the journal should not be equated with a lack of editorial transparency. A remediable infrastructure issue should not automatically outweigh years of scientific publication, peer-review activity, and academic contribution.

The mature application of standards requires judgment.

Judgment requires context.

And context requires symmetry.

Without symmetry, rigor risks becoming selective. Without proportionality, technical assessment risks becoming formalism. Without reciprocity, evaluation risks losing the moral authority upon which its legitimacy depends.

Conclusion

A broken link is a small thing.

But small things can reveal large structures.

In this case, a non-functional link within an official evaluation submission environment does not undermine the value of technical standards. Instead, it demonstrates why such standards must be applied with consistency, proportionality, and reciprocity.

If evaluator infrastructures can contain correctable imperfections without forfeiting legitimacy, applicant journals should also be granted reasonable corrective space when deficiencies are formal, remediable, and unrelated to the integrity of their scientific content.

This is not a plea for lower standards.

It is a plea for symmetrical standards.

Scholarly evaluation must remain rigorous. But rigor becomes credible only when accompanied by fairness. Technical precision matters. But precision is achieved only when applied in proportion. Evaluation systems must demand reliability. But they should also recognize that reliability is maintained through correction, not through the denial that correction is ever necessary.

The issue, once again, is not rigor.

It is reciprocity.

And where reciprocity is absent, double measure begins.