Predatory publishing: what it looks like and how to avoid it

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) process requires that journal articles and conference proceedings must be available via Open Access to be eligible. Unfortunately this has opened up the opportunity for predatory publishers to exploit unsuspecting authors, using the Open Access publishing model for their own profit.

How predatory publishers operate

Predatory publishers directly request papers with the intention of exploiting authors who need to publish their research findings in order to meet promotion or grant funding requirements. They collect extravagant fees from authors without providing the peer review services that legitimate journals provide prior to publishing papers.

There is no standard definition of a predatory publisher but they share common characteristics:

- Ultimate goal is to make money - not to publish scholarly research
- Use deception to appear legitimate
- Make false claims about the services offered
- Exploit the need for academics to publish
- Do not follow accepted scholarly publishing best practices
- Have no concern for the quality of the work published
- Unethical business practices such as:
  - Rapid acceptance of low-quality papers, including hoax papers
  - Targeting authors through mass-email spamming in attempts to get them to publish or serve on editorial board
  - Targeting young early-career researchers who face pressure to publish and are less familiar with traditional publishing business practice
  - Notifying authors of fees only after acceptance
  - Listing authors as members of editorial boards without their permission or not allowing them to resign
  - Listing fake authors as members of editorial boards or authors.
  - Fraudulent or improper use of ISSNs
  - Copying the visual design and language of the marketing materials and websites of legitimate, established journals
Giving false information about the location of the publishing operation
Displaying fake, non-existent, or mis-represented impact factors.

Why predatory publishing is harmful

When you decide to publish your article with a legitimate publisher, they will provide services such as peer-review, archiving, discovery services that enable others to find your work easily, and copyright protection. As seen above, predatory journals do not provide such services. Therefore the dangers of publishing in a predatory journal can include:

- **Lack of peer review:**
  Predatory publishers often promise a rigorous, yet speedy peer-review process. Rigorous peer-review is a time-consuming process. It cannot be completed in the short time promised by most predatory journals. The peer-review process:
  - establishes the validity of research
  - prevents falsified work from being accepted and published
  - allows authors to revise and improve papers prior to publication

- **Your work could disappear**
  Legitimate publishers are committed to preserving your published work. Predatory publishers are focused on making money, and do not care about preserving the articles they "publish." Papers published with predatory publishers could disappear from the journals website at any time. This makes it difficult to prove that your paper was ever published in the journal when applying for promotion.

- **Your work may be difficult to find**
  Predatory publishers often claim to be indexed in popular databases such as Scopus, PubMed, or Web of Science, when they are not actually included in these resources.

In summary, publishing in a predatory journal can hurt your reputation, and the reputation of your institution, and could be harmful to your career advancement.

Don't get caught out… here’s how to avoid using predatory publishers

You have received an email from a publisher interested in your research and expertise, and you want to get your research published and increase your impact. But beware the attractive offer…

The **first and most important thing** you must do is check whether there are any funding requirements about where you should publish your work. You can check using the SHERPA/JULIET tool or see links to key funder policies on our Making your research Open Access intranet page.
Next, you need to carry out some checks to verify the legitimacy of the journal and the publisher with whom you are thinking of publishing.

**How to verify the journal**
Check to see if the journal is a member of an industry association that vets its members such as:

- [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#)
- [Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)](#)

If the journal itself claims to be indexed within specific databases and has publisher symbols on its website, verify their claims. Also make sure that you have checked the journal title carefully; some publishers deliberately use names that are very close to well-known titles.

You can discover more about the journal, such as how often it publishes, where it is indexed, etc. by referring to [Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory](#). [Think. Check. Submit](#) is another website designed to help researchers identify trusted journals.

There is also a website that lists ‘potential’ predatory scholarly open-access publishers: [https://predatoryjournals.com/publishers/](https://predatoryjournals.com/publishers/) This site also lists individual suspected journal titles and possible fake sources of metrics.

**Evaluating the journal’s website and/or articles**

**Authority**
Who are the authors of the other articles and who are they affiliated with? Have they been cited by others?
Is there a peer review process evident? Caution: some claim to peer review but don’t. Have a look at the author submission guidelines and time scales. How does this compare to larger, well-known journals?
Is there an editorial panel and who is on it? Caution: some academics may appear on editorial panels without having given their permission. Verify this with academic profiles on the web, i.e. is it mentioned on their LinkedIn profile, or their institutional webpage? Can you contact them to ask?

**Currency**
When was the journal established?
How regularly are issues produced? How many articles are there per issue?

**Relevance**
Are the articles relevant to the scope of the journal? Are they relevant to your subject area?
Does the publisher appear to publish in fields that you wouldn’t normally expect to see together?
Completeness
Are the articles complete? Do they have a full reference list? Do they have a complete argument?
Are they based on studies or opinion pieces?

Accuracy
What is your general impression of the grammar, punctuation and spelling of the website and other articles?
Can you verify the content of the articles with other sources?

Bias / Language / Style and tone
Is the writing chatty, informal, reasoned, and exaggerated?
Does it use a controlled, analytical and measured style of writing?
Is the content pitched at a level you would expect for academia?

Contact information
Has the publisher provided full, verifiable contact information, including a postal address. Be wary of those that only provide web contact forms.

Author fees
Does the journal website prominently display its policy for author fees? If not, check before submitting if you wish to avoid that unexpected invoice!

Further help
Still unsure? Please contact your Library who will be happy to help.

Contacting us

https://library.cranfield.ac.uk

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