

Identifying Predatory Publishers: A Checklist



As described in the international consensus definition in Nature¹ “Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.”

Predatory tactics are continually evolving and becoming more sophisticated. The aim of this checklist is to assist you in avoiding publishing your work in a predatory or low quality journal. *Being associated with a predatory publisher can lead to financial loss as a result of inappropriate fees, or be harmful to your reputation and that of your institution, even possibly impeding promotion and tenure.*

Common Practices of Predatory Publishers

While there is no single criterion that points to whether or not a publication is legitimate, the following are some of the typical practices used by predatory publishers. An accumulation of negative indicators can point to a predatory publisher.

Process and Timeline

Much of this information can be found in author guidelines or instructions. This information should be clearly presented and address quality control processes, style/formatting, copyright, and other journal policies (such as corrections and retractions).

- Publication is guaranteed
- The time of submission to publication is unexpectedly short
- The peer review process is unclear, lacking information, or not apparent
- There is minimal information about the various steps in the process from submission to publication
- The journal requires copyright transfer during the submission process
If copyright is to be transferred to a publisher, this will typically occur after acceptance of a manuscript. Most open access journals will apply a Creative Commons (CC) license to the research, and in many cases, the author will retain copyright.
- The journal does not follow a regular publication schedule

Article Processing Charges (APCs)

Many open access journals ask for Article Processing Charges (APCs), and this is an acceptable practice. Legitimate journals will always ask for payment after acceptance, and their fees are clear and easily available.

- APC payment is required before acceptance
APCs are paid post-acceptance but pre-publication. You should not be asked to pay for an APC before the peer-review process begins. These charges should be clearly listed on the publisher's website.
- It is unclear what fees will be charged
In some fields, a modest submission or membership fee is charged at the time of manuscript submission. These fees fund editorial or peer review. In other cases there are post-acceptance fees, which might include page, colour or figure charges. The amount and purpose of any additional fees should be clearly outlined on a journal's website or policies. Look for unconventional charges like “handling fees”. If you aren't sure, check with colleagues about accepted practices.

If any of the following statements are true, do not submit your work. These are tactics commonly used by predatory publishers:

- Publication is guaranteed
- You received a spam-like unsolicited email invitation to publish work (*Note: these are different in nature than emails received from organizations or societies you belong to or have published with in the past*)
- The articles published in the journal do not match the journal's title and stated scope



Website and Contact Information

- The journal's name is easily confused with another better known journal
Confirm that the publication's ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) matches the title and country of publication that is listed at [ISSN.org](https://www.issn.org)
- The publisher cannot be easily identified or contacted
Consider looking for contact information including a telephone number and mailing address and check to see that the contact information aligns with the journal's other claims (i.e. the telephone number area code matches where the journal is based, the mailing address is not a private residence). Most publishers will have a general email account you can contact; be wary of email addresses that may be non-professional or have no affiliation with the journal (i.e.: a Gmail or Yahoo email address).
- The journal website looks amateurish or unprofessional
You may find that the journal's website is poorly designed and difficult to navigate, including dead links, as well as spelling and grammatical errors. While many legitimate journals may be poorly funded and lacking professional websites, errors and broken links are indicators that warrant a closer look at the journal.



Scope or subject matter

- The journal lacks a well-defined scope, subject area or mission
- The articles published do not match the title and stated scope and/or the journal title
For example, a nursing journal that publishes geology papers.



Indexing, Impact Factor and Archiving

- The journal is not indexed where it claims to be nor where you would expect to find the subject content
This is verifiable information. Consider the databases that you use to find research (e.g. Scopus, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, or PubMed, etc.). Is the journal included in these indexes? Note that Google Scholar, SHERPA/RoMEO, ORCID and scholarly networking sites like ResearchGate are not indexes.
- Claims about impact factors are not verifiable
 - *Predatory publishers may list fraudulent metrics such as the "Global Impact Factor" (GIF), Index Copernicus, or "Universal Impact Factor" (UIF). These are not based on recognized methodologies.*
 - *Recognized metrics include Clarivate's Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and Elsevier's CiteScore among others. The University of Toronto Libraries offers licensed resources to verify this information. Visit the [Research Impact & Researcher Identity](#) guide for more information. Not all journals are indexed in these resources and newer journals may not have journal level metrics available.*
- The journal website does not provide access to previously published volumes or has volumes that that are incomplete.



Affiliation/Publication Ethics and Policies

- The journal publishes articles that are obviously written in whole or in part by generative artificial intelligence tools without disclosure. (e.g. articles including the phrase "as an AI" or other phrasing often included in machine-generated text).
- The publisher is not a member of a recognized scholarly organization
Predatory publishers may falsely represent their affiliations. It is best to verify stated affiliations via the website of the organization a journal claims to be affiliated with. The following are some recognized organizations:
 - [COPE \(Committee on Publication Ethics\)](#)
 - [DOAJ \(Directory of Open Access Journals\)](#)
 - [Latindex](#)
 - [OASPA \(Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association\)](#)



Editorial Board

Please note it can be very difficult to verify who is on an editorial board.

- Members of the editorial board do not mention the journal on their own websites or public CVs
- There is no information about the editor or editorial board on the journal's website

Do not confuse journals from low- and middle-income countries with predatory journals

When deciding whether to publish in a journal, please remember that some of the same criteria used to disqualify predatory publishers can also disqualify journals from low- and middle-income countries.

In these countries, journal publishers may not have access to the resources to create impressive websites, register an ISSN, or maintain their own email server. A lack of resources should not disqualify these journals from your consideration if they are publishing high-quality research. A careful review of the journal's articles and a discussion of the journal with your colleagues or supervisor will always be your best guide.



Need further guidance or support?

- Talk to your supervisor and colleagues.
- For more information and resources visit <https://uoft.me/predatorypub>
- Consult your [Liaison Librarian](#).

¹ Grudniewicz, A., Moher, D., Cobey, K.D., Bryson, G.L., Cukier, S., Allen, K., Ardern, C., Balcom, L., Barros, T., Berger, M., Ciro, J.B., Cugusi, L., Donaldson, M.R., Egger, M., Graham, I.D., Hodgkinson, M., Khan, K.M., Mabizela, M., Manca, A., Lalu, M.M. (2019). *Predatory journals: no definition, no defence*. Nature (London), 576(7786), 210–212. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y>