

Predatory Publishing: Recognize the Red Flags

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Predatory journals are a pervasive problem in academic publishing. Predatory publishers mimic the open access model with the intent of making money off unsuspecting authors. Open access aims to make research more widely available by removing financial barriers on the user-side. To do this, most open access journals charge fees to the publishing author, which are used to ensure quality standards are met by the journal. In the case of a predatory journal, an author will pay a fee but will not reap the benefits of the open access model as submissions will not undergo rigorous peer review or have the enhanced impact the open access model offers.

The apparent ease of publication standards and quick turnaround of publications is especially attractive to early-career researchers who need to publish as a requirement for tenure or career advancement. Authors who publish with predatory journals not only risk not reaching their key audience, but also risk losing their copyright to a predatory publisher. Learn to recognize the red flags of predatory publishing.

Email Solicitation

One of the first red flags are emails soliciting manuscripts. If you receive a questionable email, read it closely for hints of a predatory publishing model. Be wary of flowery or overly formal language, flattery toward your work, and grammatical errors. Check if the email is from a publisher-specific email address or a generic email account anyone could create.

Journal Titles, Scope, and Fees

Predatory journals often use titles that are similar to well-known, highly respected journals. Another feature of predatory publishing houses and journals is an incredibly broad scope. A wide range of coverage may indicate the journal is not particular about the kind of articles it publishes. You should also pay close attention to the journal's description of its peer review process and fees.

Editorial Board

Do you recognize any members of the journal's editorial board? If the journal is in your topic area, you should expect to recognize names in your field. Most people who serve on editorial boards will highlight this work on their CV, online profiles, or personal websites. Search for these profiles to see if they mention their work on the journal.

Publication Timeline

Contracted timing is another red flag when it comes to predatory practices. Not only is a quick turnaround monetarily beneficial for the journal, this tactic also preys on the pressure to publish for early career and tenure track researchers. The average publication process for a reputable journal takes several months. Be suspicious of any publisher that claims to publish work in 30 days or less.

Inclusion in Databases

Many of the most well-known databases, including PubMed (MEDLINE), Scopus (Elsevier), and Web of Science (Clarivate), have review processes for journal acceptance. A journal needs to show a record of publication and meet other strict criteria to be indexed in highly regarded databases. While newer journals might take a year or so to be included, predatory journals will never make the cut.

Industry Membership

It is always helpful to check open access industry membership lists before choosing an open access journal. A journal must comply with specific publication standards and quality assurance measures to be accepted for membership, which most predatory publishers are unable to achieve. A few good options to check are the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ), the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#) (COPE), and [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) (OASPA).

The resource [Think. Check. Submit.](#) provides helpful checklists for identifying potentially predatory journals. Visit our GalterGuide on [Navigating the Publishing Process](#) to learn more about predatory journals and how to select a journal that is right for you and your research.

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