

Choosing the Right Journal

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Recently, a graduate student contacted the Libraries about a journal to which she had submitted her work. The journal had accepted her manuscript but told her that she needed to purchase an annual subscription before it could be published. This request seemed strange to her, as she had not been aware that there was any kind of fee when she submitted. She and her adviser wanted to know: was this a reputable journal? We did some digging and quickly discovered a lot of troubling information. The journal had no named editor-in-chief and lied about its impact factor on its website. In addition, a number of the articles in the journal relied on questionable sources and featured prominent spelling and grammatical errors. We alerted the student to these and other issues and she decided to withdraw her manuscript and publish elsewhere.

How do you choose the journals in which to publish? These days, there are more options than ever. Some of these new journals might be the perfect venue for your work. But before you submit your manuscript, it's important to take the time to evaluate the journal you're interested in publishing with. By doing so, you can avoid being taken advantage of by a small but growing group of unscrupulous publishers, often referred to as "predatory publishers."

Predatory publishers run online journals that will accept almost any paper submitted. They offer little in terms of copy editing or peer review. In order to confuse scholars, predatory journal titles often sound similar to more established journal titles, and their websites may include false information about impact factors, indexing, and editorial board members. They may even (illegally) re-publish papers from other journals to appear more legitimate. These are often new publishers trying to find content for new journals and are known to spam researchers to encourage them to submit their work.

Predatory publishers profit from this scheme by charging various publication fees. Charging a fee isn't necessarily a bad thing—that's simply the business model for some journals—but with predatory publishers, authors pay a fee and get very little in return. We have also seen cases where predatory publishers offer to publish a well-regarded scholar's work for free, in order to bolster the journal's shaky reputation and attract other paying authors.

It is important to point out that the line between predatory and low-quality is blurry. There are a lot of low-quality journals out there. Not all of them are predatory. In addition, although many predatory journals are open access (free to read and reuse), the vast majority of open access journals are not predatory.

Some predatory publishers also run conferences, where they accept all papers and charge attendees high fees to attend. They may claim that a famous scholar will speak at the conference, when the scholar herself never agreed to do so. In 2016, a *New York Times* reporter uncovered that one of these conferences had actually been taking place at Temple. A British publisher called the Infonomics Society organized what it called the World Conference on Special Needs Education (W.C.S.N.E). It was held at Temple for three years, and scholars from around the world participated. No university funds were spent on the conference, and no Temple faculty were involved. After [a New York Times article](#), however, Temple announced that it would no longer allow the conference to take place on campus.

Although it's difficult to quantify, predatory publishing seems to be a growing problem. The internet makes it easy for anyone to start a journal and look legitimate. In fact, it has become such an issue that the Federal Trade Commission has taken notice. In 2016, they filed a complaint against the India-based publisher OMICS, alleging that the publisher actively deceives scholars in a variety of ways. OMICS, which publishes 1,000 journals, has denied these allegations. A [recent Bloomberg Businessweek article](#) reported that the FTC estimates that researchers paid over \$26.6 million in fees to OMICS between 2009 and 2015.

Many authors who publish in predatory journals are from outside of the United States. Nonetheless, scholars in the United States are also publishing in these journals, serving on their editorial boards, and helping predatory publishers with their conferences. A [recent study in Nature](#) examined more than 1,900 biomedical papers from 200 journals the authors believed to be predatory. They found that 15% of corresponding authors came from the United States. Similarly, some may think that predatory publishing is only a problem for junior scholars, but in our experience, academics at a variety of levels can be duped by predatory journals.

You may wonder what the harm is in publishing in a predatory journal, especially when it allows you to get your research published quickly. The biggest issue is that your work will probably not be read or cited by many people, as these journals tend not to be indexed by Web of Science, Scopus, or other databases. Second, even if your research is sound, the fact that it was published in a questionable journal may lead your colleagues to doubt your findings.

How do you ensure the journal you're thinking about publishing in is trustworthy? You might have heard of Beall's List, a controversial list of predatory publishers and journals compiled by University of Colorado Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall. This list is no longer being updated, although archived versions are available online. Scholars liked Beall's List because it seemed straightforward. Unfortunately, Beall's criteria for inclusion was unclear, and there were a number of cases where new publishers were unjustly included.

Instead of relying on a list to determine whether you should submit to a particular journal, we recommend that faculty do their research. Read the articles in the journal and ask yourself if you would be proud to have your work featured next to them. Check out the website [Think, Check, Submit](#) which suggests basic questions to ask, such as: Is it clear what fees will be charged? Have you heard of the scholars on the editorial board? Are the articles indexed in services that you use? Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative? Of course, because predatory publishers have been known to lie, be sure to Google the journal to find out what others are saying about it. If you're still unsure, or just want a second opinion, contact your liaison librarian.



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