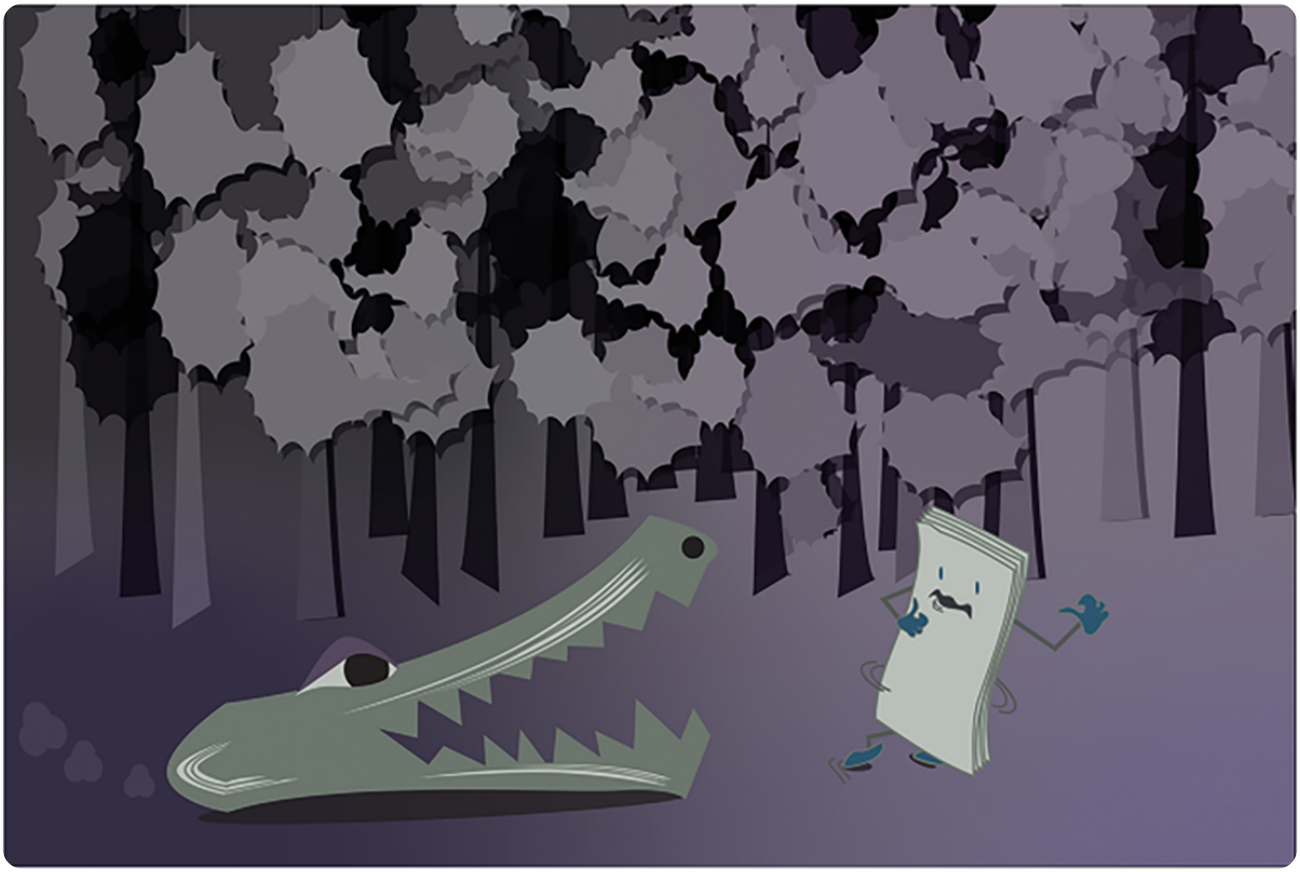
Science Societies

Navigating the publishing environment: Identifying trustworthy journals

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Determining whether a journal is predatory or not can be very time consuming and at times unclear, so it is important that early career members (and others) do their due diligence to make sure their work goes in a high quality, reputable journal. Illustration by Karen Brey.

With new online journals emerging frequently and the constant pressure for early career members to publish or perish, it is challenging to know whether a new journal is “predatory” (also known as untrustworthy or less than reputable) or not. The predatory publishing industry is now more than 10 years old, so it is understandable how early career members may unknowingly submit manuscripts for publication or serve as Editors-in-Chief and Editorial Board members for those journals.



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A well-defined peer-review process is important for assessing the quality of manuscripts. The peer-review process may vary from journal to journal; however, the Editor-in-Chief (for ASA, CSSA and SSSA journals, this is the responsibility of the journal Editor) oversees the evaluation of the submitted manuscript. It starts with an Associate Editor or Editor-in-Chief identifying and inviting potential reviewers who are generally subject matter experts on the manuscript’s research topic. Peer reviewers evaluate the manuscript; provide comments on the methodology, results, and interpretations underlying it; and recommend whether to accept it for publication with or without further revisions, or to reject it. Based on reviewers’ comments and recommendations in addition to his/her own reviews, the Editor-in-Chief decides on the fate of the manuscript.

References to Help Determine Whether a Journal is Credible

- Cabell's (**https://cabells.com**) offers predatory report services and has published various criteria (e.g., **https://bit.ly/33LjCAH**) to watch out for. (Many may recall Beall's list of predatory journals, but Jeffrey Beall stopped publishing the list in 2017.)
- NIH "Statement on Article Publication Resulting from NIH-Funded Research": **https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-18-011.html**

Identifying Predatory Publishers

Although publication numbers count for tenure and retention, it is important to do your due diligence to make sure your work goes in a high quality, reputable journal. However, determining whether a journal is predatory or not can be very time consuming and at times unclear as some of these predatory journals can have high impact factors since their papers are available online at no cost. This involves assessing a journal's overall quality (not scientific) and operational transparency although there are few tools, training, and resources available for researchers to address this issue. The following are some "red flags" for identifying whether a journal is a predatory publisher:

- Journals advertise that the review process will be completed within a week or two. Generally, this is not considered enough time to perform "rigorous" peer review. Reviewer feedback to authors may be minimal or not performed at all. Some publishers offer "expedited" peer review within a week for a higher publication fee. When possible, contact an editorial board member in the U.S. to verify whether a "rigorous" real peer review is performed or not.

- Predatory journals are generally open access (e.g., freely available online, but so are many reputable journals, so this should this should be considered in the context of other obvious indicators).
- Journal website may have many spelling and grammatical errors.
- Editor-in-Chief is not an expert in the journal's subject matter or the Editor-in-Chief position is lacking or vacant (there is only a managing editor).
- Journals require a publication fee at the time of submitting the manuscript for review.
- Author fees are not stated or unclear. The publisher notifies author of the publication fee after the article is accepted. Very low author fees are charged in order to attract large numbers of article submissions. Charges can be as low as $50 to $100.
- Editorial board members' institutional affiliations are not given. Some board "members" may even be unaware of their appointment. Board or advisory board members have never been asked to review an article.
- Journal titles of predatory journals are similar to those of established journals to create confusion.
- Scope of the journal is not represented by the Editorial Board and Editor-in-Chief (e.g., "American journal of …" with no Americans as editors-in chief or editorial board members). Or the scope of journal is so broad that any subject can be accepted for publication (e.g., Journal of Science and Technology).
- Publisher aggressively seeks author article submissions through advertising campaigns.
- No stated plan for permanent preservation of content.
- Journals are published by "professional" societies whose only function is to publish journals.

- Publisher uses bogus impact factors to advertise its journals.
- Publisher purchases a few legitimate journals as a cover for its many predatory titles and then asserts that its journals are indexed in PubMed and other reputable abstracting and indexing services.

Predatory publishers often try to have Americans and other Westerners serve as editors or editorial board members as a means of legitimizing their journals. Sometimes reputable faculty and scientists serve as Editors-in Chief, editorial board members, and reviewers (often without their knowledge). Predatory publisher website presentations can be very sophisticated. As hard as they try, it's unlikely that any large abstracting and indexing service is completely free of predatory journals. Finally, some publishers are also in the business of organizing "international" scientific conferences. What attendees have found is there are few speakers, the quality of the content is poor, and there are few attendees. The result is a lot of money and time spent for relatively little value.

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