

I recently invited New England College of Optometry librarians to speak to my class about critically evaluating resources. During the presentation, they talked about “predatory publishing.” Several students had never heard the term, and when I asked some faculty members whether they were familiar with it, many said they were not. However, after hearing a description of predatory practices, almost all of them realized they had a recent experience with a predatory journal or publisher.

The ease and speed of disseminating information via the Internet has been beneficial for researchers, librarians, faculty and anyone seeking information, and has led to the availability of open access journals. Most open access journals have the same quality attributes as print journals, including a rigorous peer-review process. However, unfortunately, many do not. Many exist for profit only and engage in unethical and unprofessional practices.¹ They are sham entities that do not provide a rigorous peer-review process or disseminate information appropriately.² These predatory journals and their publishers have become more prevalent. From 2010-2014, their publication volume increased from an estimated 53,000 to 420,000 articles, published by 8,000 active journals.³ These entities are characterized by spam e-mails used to solicit submissions, no peer review or a poor quality peer-review process, a quick turnaround time from submission to publication, fake impact factors, listing of academics as members of the editorial board without the academics’ consent, listing article processing fees (APF) only after copyright has been relinquished, and not belonging to a database for dissemination.¹⁻⁴ (Article processing fees can be assessed by legitimate journals but are always disclosed in publication guidelines with transparency.)



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Distinguishing the Good from the Bad

Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, Denver, developed and oversees a list of “potential, possible or probable” predatory journals. His list and criteria can be found at his blog, Scholarly Open Access. While Beall’s list has met with some criticism, it represents a starting point. He has included new, start-up journals and legitimate journals that were created in developing countries. Additionally, although the list is updated regularly, it may not be comprehensive. The skills and disposition to critically review resources should be used by all information-seekers as well as people interested in publishing a manuscript.

The Grand Valley State University Libraries’ Scholarly Communications Advisory Committee (SCAC) has developed a set of indicators that can be used to evaluate publishers or journals.¹ The committee identified both positive and negative indicators:

Positive indicators

- scope of the journal is well-defined and clearly stated
- journal’s primary audience is researcher/practitioners
- editor, editorial board are recognized experts in the field
- journal is affiliated with or sponsored by an established scholarly society or academic institution
- articles are within the scope of the journal and meet the standards of the discipline
- any fees or charges for publishing in the journal are easily found on the journal website and are clearly explained
- articles have DOIs (Digital Object Identifier, e.g., doi:10.1111/j1742-9544.2011.00054.x)
- journal clearly indicates rights for use and reuse of content at article level (e.g., Creative Commons CC by license)
- journal has an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number, e.g., 1234-5678)
- publisher is a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association
- journal is registered in Ulrichsweb, Global Serials Directory
- journal is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals

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- journal is included in subject database and/or indexes

Negative indicators

- journal website is difficult to locate or identify
- publisher “About” information is absent on the journal’s website
- publisher direct marketing (i.e., spamming) or other advertising is obtuse
- instructions to authors are not available
- information on peer review and copyright is absent or unclear on the journal website
- journal scope statement is absent or extremely vague
- no information is provided about the publisher or the information provided does not clearly indicate relationship to a mission to disseminate research content
- repeat lead authors in the same issue
- publisher has a negative reputation (e.g., documented examples in Chronicle of Higher Education, list-servs, etc.)

SCAC also advocates that journals be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with no single criterion indicating high or low quality.¹

Don’t Be Fooled

Scholarly publications are an expectation for most faculty members. Research with dissemination is a key component of promotion and tenure evaluations. Promotion and tenure committees often review faculty who have publications in journals that are unfamiliar to the members of the review committee. Faculty, review committees and anyone seeking information must be proactive in evaluating journals to ensure high-quality publications. Predatory journals can look like legitimate journals and very often have titles that are similar to existing journals. Faculty should be on alert for journals with unethical or unprofessional characteristics.

References

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4. Predatory publishing: Overzealous open access advocates are creating an exploitative environment, threatening the credibility of scholarly publishing [Internet]. Midland, Ontario, Canada: The Scientist; c1986-2016 [cited 2016 Oct 24]. Available from: <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/32426/title/Predatory-Publishing/>.



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