Advice on Predatory Journals and Publishers

Many publishers and Editors send targeted emails to invite authors to submit a manuscript to their journals. Such emails are common. Hiding among them may be journals and publishers whose credentials are questionable. Such journals and publishers are referred to as 'predatory'. They send spam emails to potential authors, solicit submissions with misleading promises, and then charge fees for publication that the authors did not anticipate.

When you receive an email inviting you to submit a manuscript to a scholarly journal, please consider the following questions to avoid being misled by a predatory journal or publisher:

1. Is the email’s tone overly informal and contains many exclamation points and typos? Is the message signed by an Editorial Assistant as opposed to the Editor? Is the Editor identified? Review the Editor’s academic home page and CV—is the journal editorship listed there?

2. Is the journal’s home page provided as part of the email? Is the journal’s publisher clearly acknowledged in the email? Are you invited to submit your manuscript through a generic (not journal-specific) online peer review page or via email? Some misleading communications purposefully exclude the journal’s home page and mention of the publisher, particularly if the journal’s name sounds like a leading journal in the field. If the only links provided in the email are to the online peer review system and a general Editor email (e.g., JournalEditor@[publisher].com), always search for the journal online and review its website.

3. What is the reputation of the publisher? Does the publisher’s website look professional? Are the publisher’s full contact details provided clearly on every page (email, postal address, working telephone number)? Is Impact Factor information presented clearly and without qualifiers (e.g., an asterisk, with a note in fine print that this is an “informal estimate”). Check Beall’s List, a blog by Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, tracking “potential, possible, or probable predatory” scholarly open-access publishers and journals: http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/ and http://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/. For further reading, see Beall’s List Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access Publishers and the page with Hijacked Journals (when a counterfeit site is created masquerading as an existing established journal in the field).

4. Are this and other journals by this publisher covered in PsycINFO or another research database you trust? Though inclusion in major research databases is not an ironclad guarantee of journal or publisher good practice, databases usually have processes in place to evaluate and monitor their coverage. PsycINFO’s journal coverage list, which includes the publisher information, is provided here: http://www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo/coverage.aspx. Be sure to use the title of the journal exactly as it is provided in the email. Predatory publishers often choose a journal title that sounds similar to an established journal in the field. Look for the publisher in coverage lists.

5. If the journal is identified as “open access” in the email and/or on the journal’s home page, is the journal’s financial model clearly announced? Typically, the cost of publishing in open access journals is met through author fees. Is a note on author fees—or a statement that there are no author fees—clearly visible in the email and on the journal’s home page?

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns, contact your university librarian, who can help you to ensure that the journal you choose for your next article is a legitimate one.

Best regards,

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