Checklists for Avoiding Predatory Journals

These checklists provide steps that a college faculty member can take in order to help ensure that his or her publications meet the requirements of the promotion and tenure process by assisting them in avoiding predatory publishers and the journals they publish.

Prepared by Troy University librarians Rachel Hooper and Jay Brandes. Updated July 26, 2017. This guide is a component of the LibGuide “Identifying Journals to Submit to for Publication” located online at http://troy.libguides.com/faculty/publishing.

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BE AWARE

☐ If you are not yet aware of how huge an issue this is, please understand that it is enormous. There are thousands of predatory journals actively targeting you and your colleagues.

   Predatory open-access publishers are those that unprofessionally exploit the gold open-access model for their own profit. That is to say, they operate as scholarly vanity presses and publish articles in exchange for the author fee. They are characterized by various level [sic] of deception and lack of transparency in their operations.


☐ Know that you have librarians—information professionals—available to assist you. It is usually as simple as asking, “Is this a predatory journal?” Tell us where/how you found out about it and anything else you know about it, especially the ISSN or website.

☐ Read through this guide. There are valuable nuggets of information within each checklist. You may not need or want to use all the tools listed here, or you may want to use them in a different order, so reading through this guide first can help you to make that determination.

☐ Do not trust that a colleague with whom you are collaborating has correctly reviewed the publication in question. You alone will be held responsible for your publishing activity, so it is up to you to ensure that you have selected an appropriate publishing venue.

☐ Spread the word—please help to ensure that your colleagues know about the resources presented here.
Avoiding Predatory Journals

RECORD WHAT YOU KNOW BEFORE AND AS YOU REVIEW

☐ Protect yourself. **The world has changed.** A journal that checks out as non-predatory today may show up on the predatory list tomorrow. Likewise, a journal that is listed in *Cabells Scholarly Analytics* (database) today may be removed by the time your materials are presented for the promotion and tenure process. **Protect yourself. Check with your college to see what they recommend in this regard.**

As librarians, we suggest you keep a written and even a visual record of information pertaining to the journals you publish in. If your journal is listed in Cabells Whitelists, make a record of that fact and even capture images of the information within the database. If your journal/publisher is not on a list of predatory journals/publishers at the time you are submitting for publication, then record that fact.

Moving on from the concept above (protect yourself), key information that can help you as you begin to review a journal includes:

☐ **Title of the journal**

☐ **International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) of the journal**

☐ **Name and address of the publisher**

☐ **Name of the journal editor**

☐ **Website of the publisher**

☐ **Website of the journal**

☐ **What the current volume/issue is** (to give you an idea how new it is, and so you can adjust your level of expectancy in terms of what you will be able to find out about the journal)

☐ Other information that looks like it might be useful for investigating, e.g., organizational affiliations the journal has or any services they state they are indexed by
This should always be the first stop when checking on a potentially predatory journal.

If you have a totally unknown journal, particularly one that could be a predatory journal, start with the Google Internet search engine https://www.google.com. Separately, check the journal title and the publisher.

You are looking to see if others have identified your journal or publisher as predatory or as otherwise untrustworthy. This is not about looking at a publisher’s website to make that determination for yourself (that is a different process).

☐ Google the title of the journal (alone) to see if anything suspicious is found just by doing that. EXAMPLE: For the journal, American Based Research Journal, the search should end right there when you see (and read) the entry for “Spam Email from Questionable Journal Provides Comic Relief.”

If you do not already have this information, your Google search should locate the website for the journal.

☐ Google the title of the journal along with the word predatory.

☐ Google the name of the publisher along with the word predatory. This is the step that most faculty are not aware of. Many publishers are so prolific in their “publishing,” (we use that term loosely) that they have a journal for every subject under the sun.
CABELLS SCHOLARLY ANALYTICS

Cabells Scholarly Analytics is a database provided by the Troy University Library.

Link here for the guide on using Cabells [http://troy.libguides.com/cabell](http://troy.libguides.com/cabell)

Cabells is the *go to* directory for scholarly publishing. It has two searchable databases:

**Whitelist** “Our curated list of over 11,000 academic journals spanning 18 disciplines guides researchers and institutions in getting the most impact out of their research.” For quality journals, Cabell’s Whitelist should contain enough information for you to identify a journal as non-predatory—just the fact that it is on the Whitelist may be all you need to know.

**Blacklist** “Specialists analyze over 60 behavioral indicators to keep the community aware of the growing threats and to keep academia protected from exploitative operations.” Cabells is not stating outright that journals on this list are predatory, but for each title listed, they do list “Violations”—unfavorable information pertaining to the journal.

Examples of “Violations”:

**Publication Practices**

- No articles are published or the archives are missing issues and/or articles.

**Peer Review**

- Does not have a clearly stated peer review policy.

**Website**

- Does not identify a physical address for the publisher or gives a fake address.
- Does not identify a physical editorial address for the journal or gives a fake address.
- Poor grammar and/or spelling.

☐ Is your journal listed in Cabells Whitelist?

☐ Is your journal listed in Cabells Blacklist?
DIRECTORY OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

To check on an open-access journal, this tool can be of some utility. Reading their “About” page is a good way to better understand this resource:
https://doaj.org/about

The Directory of Open Access Journals is online at http://doaj.org/.

Inclusion in the DOAJ does not automatically mean that a journal is appropriate for academic scholarship, but exclusion from this directory should raise a red flag.

“The aim of the DOAJ is to increase the visibility and ease of use of open access scientific and scholarly journals, thereby promoting their increased usage and impact. The DOAJ aims to be comprehensive and cover all open access scientific and scholarly journals that use a quality control system to guarantee the content. In short, the DOAJ aims to be the one-stop shop for users of open access journals.”
http://doaj.org/about

☐ Is the journal listed in the DOAJ?

OPEN ACCESS SCHOLARLY PUBLISHER’S ASSOCIATION

To check on an open-access journal, this tool can be of some utility.

Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association http://oaspa.org/

"The Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) is a trade association that was established in 2008 in order to represent the interests of Open Access (OA) journal publishers globally in all scientific, technical and scholarly disciplines. This mission will be carried out through exchanging information, setting standards, advancing models, advocacy, education, and the promotion of innovation."
http://oaspa.org/about/

☐ At the site, click “View Full List of Members.” If your publisher is listed, that does not mean you are golden, but it should mean that the publisher is not predatory and that you can then continue to look into its suitability for your publishing need.

While a publisher’s membership in the OASPA does not automatically mean that their journals are appropriate for academic scholarship, their lack of membership should prompt you to further investigate the publisher and their publications. This means looking in Ulrich’s and Cabell’s (see the next two entries).
ULRICH’S PERIODICALS DIRECTORY

Ulrich’s is useful to a point. Ulrichsweb is a database provided by the Troy University Library. **To access Ulrich’s, log in via the Library’s databases page.**

Ulrich’s provides **basic information** about 100,000+ serial publications. Ulrich’s lists the *New England Journal of Medicine*, but it also lists *Mad* magazine, so inclusion in Ulrich’s does not mean it is something you should be publishing in . . . it could still be a predatory journal or simply non-academic.

There are many predatory journals listed in Ulrich’s.

Think of Ulrich’s as telling you, “Yes, this journal exists, it is not completely bogus, and here is some information about it.”

**NOTE:** Predatory journals are run by liars and cheats. Ulrich’s may state that a journal is refereed because the journal states that it is, so you have to take the “refereed” notation in Ulrich’s with a grain of salt.

**How to use Ulrich’s:**

Log in and search by journal title.

☐ Is the journal listed in Ulrich’s? If it is not, **loud bells should be going off in your head**. The magazine *100 Crosswords* is listed in Ulrich’s, as is *Modern Cat*—if your journal is not listed in Ulrich’s it is either brand spanking new or it is probably run out of someone’s basement.

When you have identified the correct journal, click on its title to see the full record for that journal.

Newer open access journals will, understandably, lack most of the robust information of an established journal, especially a print journal, but looking through the journal record can give you clues as to the journal’s quality/authenticity or lack thereof.

**CLUES:**

Be very, very nervous about journals without an ISSN. Virtually every real journal, especially those that are refereed, will have an ISSN.

Use the advanced search in Ulrich’s to search by **publisher** to see what other journals they publish. Note that predatory publishers may have a stable of sound-alike journals for any and every discipline in a given field of study. Example: [http://www.akrpub.com/Journals.php](http://www.akrpub.com/Journals.php)
Avoiding Predatory Journals

If the publisher’s email address is @yahoo or @gmail or something like that, it is a very bad sign.

As librarians, we like knowing where a journal is indexed and where it is available online. Look at the sections of the journal record for Online Availability and Abstracting & Indexing. Because you may not be familiar with many of these services, you may want to ask a librarian for his or her opinion. For comparison’s sake, look at those record areas for a reputable open access journal: Sage Open ISSN 2158-2440.

THE JOURNAL AND PUBLISHER’S WEBSITES

If you get to the point where you are trying to evaluate a journal only by what its publisher/website says about itself, i.e., the tools above did not prove conclusive, it is probably time to let the journal go.

These websites can be very deceptive and it can be difficult to make a conclusive judgment based solely on the information found there.

For the most part, reviewing a publisher’s website is something to do in order to confirm information—usually negative information—that you located elsewhere, e.g., the publisher lists their address as 3667 Las Vegas Boulevard South, but you learned that is the address of The UPS Store at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino.

See the “Buyer beware…” information, below.

□ Review both the journal and the publisher’s websites to see if they match up with what you have found out elsewhere about the journal. See the Hints… information, next item, to assist you in that process.
HINTS, ALLEGATIONS, AND THINGS LEFT UNSAID


☐ Read the item “Buyer beware: A checklist to identify reputable publishers,” toward the end of this article (*Investigating…*). Text reproduced below.


“Buyer beware: A checklist to identify reputable publishers” by Declan Butler.

How to perform due diligence before submitting to a journal or publisher.

- Check that the publisher provides full, verifiable contact information, including address, on the journal site. Be cautious of those that provide only web contact forms.
- Check that a journal’s editorial board lists recognized experts with full affiliations. Contact some of them and ask about their experience with the journal or publisher.
- Check that the journal prominently displays its policy for author fees.
- Be wary of e-mail invitations to submit to journals or to become editorial board members.
- Read some of the journal’s published articles and assess their quality. Contact past authors to ask about their experience.
- Check that a journal’s peer-review process is clearly described and try to confirm that a claimed impact factor is correct.
- Find out whether the journal is a member of an industry association that vets its members, such as the Directory of Open Access Journals ([www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org)) or the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association ([www.oaspa.org](http://www.oaspa.org)).
- Use common sense, as you would when shopping online: if something looks fishy, proceed with caution.

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