

Beware of predatory journals: How to guide your authors in publishing their work while protecting their career and your institution's reputation

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There are many benefits for the faculty and students in your institution to pursue getting published in scholarly journals. These benefits include the opportunity to share research with the technical community, increased exposure and recognition for their work, the enhanced credibility associated with publishing in a leading journal, and the opportunity for career advancement. It also includes the benefits of having a paper peer-reviewed and receiving valuable feedback on research from leading experts in their field of study.



The Challenges of Getting Published

Although rewarding, the publishing process can sometimes be challenging for an author to navigate, particularly early-stage authors. It requires authors to be extremely thorough in their research and findings, follow best practices in scholarly publishing, and do their homework to learn the specific publisher requirements to help get their work accepted, reviewed, and published faster. The submission, acceptance, and publication process can sometimes take weeks to months, depending on the journal. In addition, many of the top journals in the field maintain very high standards and require that a paper be original, timely, and advance new innovations in the particular area of discovery. For a new author, the requirements and process can be a bit intimidating and even frustrating if their initial attempts end in rejection.

And rejection is a very likely outcome because the vast majority of papers submitted to a reputable scholarly journal will get rejected. As an example, the IEEE multi-disciplinary open access journal *IEEE Access* rejects 70% of the papers it receives for consideration. However, these quality standards and subsequent rejections are a benefit to the scientific process and the scholarly community, and the selectivity often adds to the reputation of the journal and the likelihood of citations to articles therein. In addition to raising the level of quality of the corpus of scientific literature available to the community, authors have the opportunity to take the feedback from the reviewing experts to heart, take the work to the next level, and finally put it all together to publish a new and improved paper in a leading journal.

Predatory Publishers Offer Shortcuts – At a Price

The path to get published can be long and difficult for some authors as the pressure to publish continues to grow. As such, there are publishers offering quick and easy “shortcuts” to publication. These “predatory publishers” are profit driven and take advantage of a prospective author’s desire and need to get published, offering guarantees of publication through a quick and easy process – for a fee. Predatory journals undermine the scientific process and short change authors by forgoing peer review and accepting and publishing virtually all papers submitted. They sometimes publish under a journal name similar enough to a reputable journal in order to confuse the prospective author. Using these practices, they often mislead researchers into thinking they are legitimate and aggressively solicit research manuscripts, which they quickly accept and publish, without peer review and with no regard for the quality of the papers. Thus, they often publish flawed papers that most reputable scholarly journals would reject. But there are dangers in accepting this quick-and-easy route to publishing that can be damaging to an author’s career, can invalidate years of work and research, and can even harm the reputation of the author and their institution.



Predatory Journal Warning Signs for Authors

Predatory publishers have deceived many authors into believing that they publish legitimate scholarly journals. For a new, inexperienced author, it may be difficult to identify these predatory journals. Authors need to be on the lookout for false or misleading information, but this can be difficult to spot. It should be noted that there is not any one single identifier that undeniably distinguishes a predatory journal from a truly credible scholarly journal. But when an author starts to see a pattern of several concerning factors begin to add up, then it might be best to find an alternative publishing option. Here is a list of warning signs you can share with authors at your institution:

- **Suspicious Calls for Papers:** If you receive a call for papers email from a journal you are unfamiliar with, review it thoroughly. Is the email's tone perhaps overly informal? Does it seem to make vague or exaggerated claims about its readership or citations? Is it practically guaranteeing that your work will be published? If so, this could be a red flag. Here is an example of a legitimate [call for papers](#) from an established, reputable journal you can use for comparison purposes.
- **Reputation of Publisher:** Are you unfamiliar with the publisher? If so, check with colleagues to see if they have any information or look for information on social media channels or message boards related to your field. Does the publisher’s website look professional? Are the full contact details provided clearly on every page? Can you find information on the history and mission of the organization? For an example, you can find information on the IEEE [mission and history](#) here.
- **Journal Quality:** One of the many factors that academia commonly uses in assessing journal quality is citation metrics. So you may want to do some research to see if the journal is highly cited. Does it have an Impact Factor (IF), Eigenfactor, Article Influence Score or other citation metrics? Can you tell if the metric is an actual score or a “publisher estimate”? Can you verify this information in Clarivate’s annual

Journal Citation Report? For an example, you can find citation information on any journal's [home page](#) in the IEEE *Xplore* Digital Library.

- **Editorial Board:** Is the journal's editorial board listed online? If so, can you find profiles of the editors listed in Web of Science or Google Scholar? Can you find a profile of the editor on their employer or institution's site? See this example of an [editorial board](#) from the IEEE *Access* multi-disciplinary open access journal.
- **Indexing:** Is the journal listed and indexed in scholarly journal databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, or the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)? Databases such as these typically have processes in place to evaluate the journals indexed. For an example, here is a listing of [databases](#) that IEEE partners with to make an author's published works easily discoverable.
- **Editorial and Publication Practices:** Each journal should contain easy to find links to its publishing principles, ethics guidelines, and copyright practices. If a journal requires a transfer of copyright for publishing an open access article, that may be another red flag. See this example of [publishing principles and guidelines](#) from IEEE.
- **Peer Review:** This is an important benefit in getting published for an author and an opportunity to receive feedback on your work from your peers. Many predatory journals do not offer peer review since the goal is to publish as much as possible. Explore the publisher website to find out more about the peer-review process and inquire for more information about what to expect. Does the journal site mention its acceptance rate (which should not be too high) or alternatively its rejection rate (which should not be too low). For an example, see this overview of the [stages of peer review](#) from IEEE *Access*.
- **Other Factors:** Does something else seem not quite right about a journal's call for papers but you are not sure what? If so, then ask for help. Keep in mind that you are putting your professional reputation at stake with your publishing decision. If you have any questions or concerns about a journal, you should contact your university librarian who can help you ensure that the journal you choose for your next article is the right choice for your work and career. And if you are unsure if a call for papers for a journal is actually from a known publisher such as IEEE, please feel free to [contact](#) the publisher to confirm.

As you can see predatory journal publishing has the potential to harm an author's career, an institution's reputation and dilutes the quality of scientific information available to the scholarly community. However, publishers, libraries, and institutions can work together to educate authors and provide them with the guidance and tools needed to get their work recognized and published in legitimate scholarly journals to gain exposure for their work and help advance their careers. The path to publishing in a scholarly journal can be challenging but is well worth the rewards for the author, the institution, and the scientific community.

Additional Resources:

- **Events and Webinars:** To hear additional tips and best practices in publishing from established authors and editors, authors can also register for several upcoming and on-demand [Webinars](#).
- **Tools and Resources:** For more tools and guidance to help authors through the process to successfully publish in a scholarly journal, please visit the [IEEE Author Center](#).

- **Open Access Options:** For more information on open access publishing options for authors and institutions and a list of all participating institutions, please visit open.ieee.org.

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