

# **A Guide to Identifying Predatory Journals and Publishers**

Collected by

Ethical Publishing and Dissemination Working Group,

European Network for Academic Integrity

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## Authorship and version control

Version	Date	Created by	Change history
1.0	30 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	ENAI EPAD working group	
1.1	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	Irene Glendinning, Cristina Verissimo, working group members	Removed duplication, minor wording changes, added embedded links to URLs and references. Added scoring system.

## About the Checklist

This checklist is designed to guide researchers and authors in identifying potential predatory journals and/or publishers. Predatory journals and publishers are a concerning phenomenon in academic publishing. They typically exploit the open-access publishing model for profit, often charging authors substantial fees to publish their articles without providing standard publishing services such as rigorous peer review and editorial oversight (Shamseer et al., 2017). These predatory entities lack transparency and often engage in deceptive practices such as mimicking legitimate journals, making false claims about impact factors or indexing, and listing academic professionals as editorial board members without their consent (Beall, 2012). The publishing of scientifically flawed or poorly vetted content in these outlets can undermine the integrity of scholarly research, potentially contaminating the academic record and misleading researchers and policymakers who rely on this information (Grudniewicz et al., 2019).

Various critical parameters are included in the checklist, such as Journal Title and Authenticity, Membership and Associations, Financial Aspects, Quality and Scope, Editorial and Publishing Practices, Communication and Invitations, Copyright and Legal Aspects, and Indexing/Archiving.

A combination of positive factors (indicating this publisher / journal / conference may be genuine, reputable and authentic), negative factors (suggesting this may be disreputable, fake or hijacked) and neutral factors are included in this checklist. Some of the points include notes to highlight where further research will help to determine whether this represents a positive or negative factor.

## How to use the Checklist

Identifying potentially predatory, poor quality or disreputable publishers / journals / conferences is not straightforward. Evidence of some of the negative factors included here may apply to well-established, reputable publishers / journals / conferences. Some of the information on communications from and web sites of disreputable publishers / journals / conferences may be fabricated, misleading or otherwise false, to boost their credibility and reputation to unsuspecting authors.

The checklist is presented as a series of questions under eight different headings. Sometimes an answer will add to the evidence that this journal may be disreputable or potentially predatory. Sometimes an answer will support the evidence that the journal or publisher is reputable. Although the questions are mainly about academic journals, the checklist can be equally applied to fake conferences and predatory publishers. Each grid of questions will present any positively worded questions before the negatively worded questions.



Positive points: In general terms, the more positive points that apply to the journal or publisher the more desirable they are for publishing or disseminating academic work. These items score 1 if the answer is yes (Y) and 0 if the answer is no (N).



Negative points: In general terms, the more negative points that apply to the journal or publisher the less desirable they are for publishing or disseminating academic work. These items score 0 if the answer is yes (Y) and 1 if the answer is no (N).

Add the scores to create the sub-total and then put these in the scoring grid at the end, to calculate the overall score.

## A. Journal Title and Authenticity

✗		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
1	Does the journal title closely resemble that of another reputable journal in your field, yet something seems off-kilter?	
2	Is the journal title very similar to those of highly respected legitimate journals, with only subtle modifications?	
3	Is the journal title vague, non-specific, using only terms such as "International", "World", "Global", "Research", "Scientific", or "Universal"?	
4	Does the journal mimic another journal title or the website of that journal?	
5	Is the journal name the same as or easily confused with that of another?	
6	Is the journal on any watchlists such as Beall's or Cabells lists of Predatory Journals?	
<b>Journal Title and Authenticity Sub-total</b>		<b>/6</b>

## B. Financial Aspects

✓		<b>Score</b> (Y=1/ N=0)
7	Are fees clearly stated in terms of currency and amount?	
8	Is the information about fees easy to find and understand?	
9	Do the payment methods include the usual options (credit and debit cards, direct bank transfer, etc)? (digital currencies are assumed to be non-valid)	
10	Does the publisher's website explain whether or not fee waivers are available?	
11	Does the journal receive public funding (e.g. from a government) or grants?	
12	Does the publisher explain on their website how they are financially supported?	
✗		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
13	Does the journal charge handling fees in addition to any article processing charge (APC)?	
14	Do any fees arise during submission or publication that are initially hidden, unjustified or unexplained?	
15	Are there any unexpected terms and conditions for payments?	
16	Does the journal market itself as offering cheaper and faster open access publishing than traditional journals? (quality control flawed or non-existent?)	
<b>Financial Aspects Sub-total</b>		<b>/10</b>

## C. Membership and Associations

		Score (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
17	Is the journal or its publisher a member of Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), COPE (the Committee on Publication Ethics) or any other recognized professional organisation committed to best publishing practices?	
18	Is the publisher connected to a reputable educational or research institution or a recognised industry association?	
		<b>Score (Y=0/ N=1)</b>
✗		
19	Does the journal falsely claim to be a member of DOAJ, COPE or similar organisation? Claims should be checked with <a href="#">DOAJ</a> / <a href="#">COPE</a>	
<b>Memberships and Associations Sub-total</b>		<b>/3</b>

## D. Quality and Scope

		Score (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
20	Are the quality and scope of papers already published by the journal or publisher appropriate?	
21	Does the publisher use permanent digital identifiers like DOI?	
22	If the journal claims to have the <a href="#">DOAJ Seal</a> – do they meet the criteria, including those listed below this table? <sup>1</sup>	
		<b>Score (Y=0/ N=1)</b>
✗		
23	Is the scope of the journal overly broad? This is often done to attract more articles and increase the revenue from author fees.	
24	Does the journal combine two or more domains that are normally unrelated?	
25	Are any papers published by the journal on topics outside the stated scope?	
26	Are there errors in the titles and abstracts, or frequent and repeated typographical or factual errors throughout the published papers?	
27	Are there signs and errors that may indicate the publisher or reviewers are unfamiliar with the field?	
<b>Quality and Scope Sub-total</b>		<b>/8</b>

<sup>1</sup> Criteria for holding a DOAJ Seal include the need for the publisher to:

- a. provide permanent identifiers [eg, DOIs] in the papers published;
- b. provide DOAJ with article metadata;
- c. deposit content with a long-term digital preservation or archiving program;
- d. embed machine-readable CC licensing information in articles;
- e. allow generous reuse and mixing of content, in accordance with a CC BY, CC BY-SA or CC BY-NC license;
- f. have a deposit policy registered with a deposit policy registry;
- g. allow the author to hold the copyright without restrictions.

## E. Indexing and Archiving

		<b>Score</b> (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
42	Is the journal indexed by the typical databases used for this field?	
43	Does a journal have an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number)? <sup>4</sup>	
44	Do other journals by the same publisher have reputable indexing?	
45	Are articles indexed and/or archived in dedicated services?	
46	Will your article be indexed/archived in an easily discoverable database?	
47	Does the publisher ensure long-term archiving, preservation of digital publications?	
		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
✗		
48	Does the journal boast about its high quality, with misleading or false claims about journal metrics, indexing, impact factor (IF), despite being new? <sup>5</sup>	
59	Does the journal make false claims about indexing (e.g. PUBMED)? <sup>5</sup>	
50	Does the journal include indexes that are not reputable or mainstream? <sup>5</sup>	
<b>Indexing and Archiving Sub-total</b>		<b>/9</b>

<sup>4</sup> Note: Check ISSN using [ISSN Portal](#).

<sup>5</sup> Note: Fake impact factors (IF) may include Universal Impact Factor (UIF), Global Impact Factor (GIF), and Citefactor. IFs and other journal metrics can be checked through Web of Science, Scopus or similar credible sources.

## F. Editorial and Publishing Practices

		<b>Score</b> (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
32	Does the journal website provide a list of credible, reputable editorial board members, with affiliations and contact details? <sup>3</sup>	
33	Is the journal's publishing schedule clearly stated and realistic?	
34	Is the review process clearly described (desk checking, peer review)?	
35	Is the stated time for peer review realistic? (reputable journals normally allow at least one month for peer review)	
36	Does the journal display strategies for how to handle misconduct, retraction, corrections / errata and conflicts-of-interest?	
37	Does the journal explain how it will secure the long-term archiving of articles when no longer in operation?	
×		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
38	Is the editor-in-chief of the journal also editing numerous other journals across a variety of different disciplines?	
39	Does the journal promise fast publication or an easy peer-review process?	
40	Is it difficult to find out who manages the journal?	
41	Is the publishing schedule impossibly short and/or frequent?	
<b>Editorial and Publishing Practices Sub-total</b>		<b>/10</b>

<sup>3</sup> Note: If the journal looks suspicious, it may be possible to check whether the editorial board is genuine by contacting one or more of the named board members - whether they are aware of their inclusion on this editorial board and the web site – disreputable journals sometimes harvest bios and details of highly respectable international academics without their knowledge to fraudulently boost perceptions of their respectability.

## G. Communications and Invitations

		Score (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
51	Does the journal's website look and feel legitimate, with a professional design, accurately revealing the journal's editorial office location? <sup>6</sup>	
52	Is there a statement about the journal's standards or ethical practices on its website?	
53	Does the journal have an authentic communications presence (e.g. social media profiles, a public relations page, etc.)? <sup>6</sup>	
		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
✗		
54	Have you received [spam] emails or unsolicited invitations to submit an article for publication from the journal?	
55	Are emails from the journal editor written in poor language and inconsistent or unclear in their claims?	
56	Is the email addressed personally to you, with misplaced or exaggerated flattery, referencing one of your publications?	
57	Is the contact email address non-professional and non-journal related (i.e. @yahoo.com, ao.com or @gmail.com)? <sup>6</sup>	
58	Is the name of the person emailing you odd and/or different from the contact address given later in the email?	
59	Does the email invite you to a conference or to publish in a journal that is outside your research area?	
60	Does the journal claim to be based in one or more major cities (e.g., London or New York) when it is actually published somewhere else, or does its title claim a national affiliation that doesn't match its location?	
61	Does the journal's website have spelling or grammatical errors (item 35), non-related or non-academic advertisements, pop-ups or other blinking elements? <sup>6</sup>	
<b>Communications and Invitations Sub-total</b>		<b>/11</b>

<sup>6</sup> Note: Predatory journals are getting much smarter about addressing these aspects, which is making it much harder to distinguish between reputable and disreputable journals.



## H. Copyright and Legal Aspects

		<b>Score</b> (Y=1/ N=0)
✓		
28	Does the journal clearly describe copyright agreements?	
29	If the article is to be published Open Access, does it mention is a <a href="#">Creative Commons license</a> mentioned stating the rights to use and reuse the content of the article?	
30	Does the journal require the manuscript to be submitted by creating an account or registering on a (secure) journal platform? <sup>2</sup>	
		<b>Score</b> (Y=0/ N=1)
✗		
31	Does the journal demand the copyright of the paper while claiming to be an open-access journal?	
<b>Copyright and Legal Aspects Sub-total</b>		<b>/4</b>

<sup>2</sup> Note: Submission via email or using a simple online form without any registration could be a sign of a reputable small publisher or newly established subject journal, but it could also be a sign of a disreputable provider).

## Overall Scoring

	Category	Max score	Sub-total	Threshold for OK	Notes on weaknesses
A	Journal Title and Authenticity	6		>=3	
B	Financial Aspects	10		>=6	
C	Membership and Associations	3		>=2	
D	Quality and Scope	8		>=4	
E	Indexing and Archiving	9		>=5	
F	Editorial and Publishing Practices	10		>=6	
G	Communication and Invitations	11		>=6	
H	Copyright and Legal Aspects	4		>=2	
<b>Total score and decision</b>		61		>=30 <sup>7</sup>	

<sup>7</sup> Note: Even when the total score is above the threshold, if any single category is below the threshold, then the journal should be regarded as suspect.

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