

**Advice for authors
Avoiding predatory, fake,
unethical, illegitimate and
questionable journals**

**AuthorAID
in the Eastern
Mediterranean**

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Many honest researchers have been deceived by predatory journals. You should ask your academic authorities if there is an official list of approved journals for researchers in your country. There is also good advice here about avoiding predatory or unethical journals: <https://academicpositions.com/career-advice/don-t-fall-prey-to-predatory-journals> .

Be safe, don't be sorry

Don't submit your manuscript to a predatory or fake journal. They offer immediate open access for published articles with a low article processing charge (APC). They also say that publication will be faster than at other journals.

These two factors – the low cost and the short publication delay – are exactly what many researchers need for their career. So journals that offer these two advantages are very attractive. But some of these journals are a trap for researchers and institutions. **If you are even a little suspicious or uncertain about the journal, you should take time to investigate it before you submit your manuscript.**

It's better to be cautious and spend time investigating the journal, even if you are under a lot of pressure to publish as soon as possible. After you submit a manuscript to a fake journal it can be very difficult or impossible to withdraw it. If a fake journal publishes your article, it can be very difficult or impossible to retract the publication and submit the same article to a legitimate journal. Publication in a fake journal may mean that your work is wasted, and the funding you received for your research is also wasted.

Indexing and impact factors

Fake journals often falsely claim to be indexed in major databases, and falsely claim to have an impact factor. You can verify whether the journal has an authentic impact factor (calculated by Clarivate Analytics) by checking the Web of Science Master Journal List here <http://mjl.clarivate.com/> .

When you search for information about the journal, it is important to use the exact title as it appears on the journal's website. Some questionable journals have a title that is very similar to the title of an authentic journal. Sometimes the only difference is the use of "The" or the spelling of one word. Some predatory journals copy legitimate journal titles and even journal websites intentionally, to deceive researchers.

If the journal title you use to search the Web of Science Master Journal List does not produce any positive identification, it's better to avoid the journal if you need an authentic impact factor for your publication.

Peer review

Fake journals claim that all manuscripts are peer reviewed or refereed, but this is often not true. If you submit a manuscript to a fake journal and then soon receive acceptance with no changes, this is evidence that no peer review was used. If you quickly receive reviewers' reports that are short, superficial, and say everything looks good and the manuscript should be accepted, this is also evidence that the peer review process was not rigorous.

When we submit a manuscript, we think it is wonderful and should be published. But every careful, expert reviewer of every paper will find things that should be improved. Sometimes reviewers find errors that are potentially embarrassing; then we feel grateful for good peer review. Uncritical reviews that say "no problems, accept as is" can mean the reviewer was not really an expert, or did not read the manuscript carefully, or (especially at predatory journals) does not exist.

Fake journals may list well-known, prestigious scientists on their editorial board, but these names may be used without the scientists' knowledge or permission. If you check the editorial board and see anyone you know personally, you can ask them if they are really a member. Many times, it is discovered this way that scientists didn't know their names were being used by the journal without their permission, to give a false impression of prestige.

Hidden publication costs

It is the ethical responsibility of journals and publishers to make perfectly clear how much the authors must pay for immediate, complete (gold) open access. You have the right to know this **before** you submit your manuscript.

But this information is sometimes hard to find on the journal's website (even for legitimate journals), and may be provided in different sections of the instructions, guidelines, and editorial, publication, or access policies. This makes it important to carefully read all sections of the journal's website before you decide to submit your manuscript.

Journals may say that after acceptance, there will be additional charges for editing, language polishing, equations, flow charts, figures or tables. This is not a transparent way to publish research. **Authors should know the full, final cost of publication before submission, not after acceptance.**

Predatory and fake journals (and sometimes, legitimate journals) often demand additional payment from authors after acceptance, and try to force authors to pay the additional charges by saying publication will be delayed until payment is made. If this situation happens to you, there are two possibilities.

1. If the journal is legitimate and honest, the journal will allow you to formally withdraw your manuscript (even after acceptance) because you did not understand the rules about additional costs when you submitted the manuscript. The journal will not try to force you to pay if you do not have enough funds.
2. If the journal is predatory, it will send you threatening emails in aggressive language to try to force you to pay, because fake journals are only interested in money. They are not interested

in high-quality research. They are exploiting pressure to publish and researchers' the lack of information about transparent, professional publication policies.

If you are in the situation described in point number 2, it's a good idea to report your experience with the journal to your institution, so that the academic authorities can alert all researchers to avoid this journal or publisher. This will give your institution and your colleagues valuable information that can help them avoid this problem.

For journals that try to force authors to pay a publication fee even if the authors withdraw the manuscript, you can ignore their emails. Because of complications with international legal and financial systems, it is impossible in practical and legal terms for the publisher or owner of a predatory journal to force you to pay. If you ignore their emails they will stop sending them after some time. They are just trying to scare you.

Don't be deceived by invitations to submit your work

Predatory publishers send millions of emails to researchers to invite them to submit their work, because they are looking for victims who will pay for fast publication. Editors of legitimate, honest journals almost never contact an individual researcher personally with an invitation like this, because these journals already receive more than enough good manuscripts to consider.

If you receive an invitation to submit your work, and if you have never heard of the journal before, check the name of the person who signs the email and the title of the journal on the internet, to see if there is any information indicating that the journal or publisher is predatory, fake, or questionable. Usually it's best to just delete the email immediately and ignore it.

The language in email invitations from predatory journals is often full of errors in the English, has an informal, familiar tone rather than a more formal, academic tone, and a lot of flattery about your "impressive", "excellent" or "impactful" research. Often, these emails do not show your name correctly. Be careful. The journal is trying to manipulate you. An editor from a legitimate journal will use an appropriately professional tone.

Read journal websites carefully

Even for experienced researchers, it can be difficult to judge whether a journal is legitimate or predatory on the basis of its website. This is because predatory publishers copy information (and sometimes even format and graphic elements) from legitimate websites. Even if the website mentions an impact factor, provides an ISSN, lists databases and indexes, indicates the Scopus quartile, or cites publication authorities such as ICMJE, WAME, AMA or COPE, it is still best to check the journal title on the Web of Science Master Journal List and on the list of approved journals from your country's academic authorities.

Read the information on the website carefully, and if you are not sure of the meaning of anything, ask your academic authorities, an expert in publication policies, or your librarian. You can also email the journal to request clarification. An honest, legitimate journal will send you a clear explanation. A predatory journal may never reply to your inquiry, or may send a response that is not clear, or may simply repeat the same invitation in the same misleading language.

Here is an **example** of information provided by a journal from a possibly questionable publisher.

Page charge

Each page (A4) will be charged to authors at Euro 200.00. For each image additional Euro 200.00 will be charged to the authors. Additional fee will be applicable for articles which requires high level editing (Eg: articles with complex equations, flow charts and tables) and language polishing. Payment may be made before publishing the manuscript/s.

Fee Policy

Once an article has been accepted for publication, any Article Processing Charges become due towards the time and resources utilized in processing the article. The submitting author assumes responsibility for the Article Processing Charges and also once a payment is processed, the journal will not issue refunds of any kind.

Author Withdrawal Policy

From time to time, an author may wish to withdraw a manuscript after submitting it.

Changing one's mind is an author's prerogative. And an author is free to withdraw an article at no charge – as long as it is withdrawn within 07 days of its initial submission.

Important: The information appears to be transparent and complete, but the emphasis seems to be on getting authors to pay for as many things as possible.

Important: Note that this journal allows you to withdraw your manuscript after initial submission, but not after it is accepted.

Important: Note that some questionable journals publish articles even if the APC is not paid, and even after the authors asked to withdraw their manuscript.

I submitted my manuscript to a questionable journal by mistake. Can I withdraw it and submit it to a legitimate journal?

Keep copies of all your correspondence with all journals – even for journals you are sure are legitimate. This means saving all your emails to and from the journal, and making screenshots of the website manuscript submission system screens that show the name of the journal and the title of the manuscript you submitted.

It is important to save your request to withdraw your manuscript. This request may allow you to submit the manuscript to a legitimate journal, if the questionable journal does not reply to your request to withdraw your manuscript. Unfortunately, predatory journals often do not respond to authors who want to withdraw their manuscript.

If you submit to another journal you should tell the editor honestly that the manuscript was submitted to a predatory journal and then withdrawn or retracted by the authors (and send a copy of your request to withdraw or retract it) because you realized that it is a questionable journal. Don't be too embarrassed to admit that this happened to you. The editors of legitimate journals usually understand the situation, but the decision to consider your manuscript may depend on the publisher's policy, not on the editor. Some journals will be willing to consider your withdrawn manuscript, but other may not be willing to consider it because of rules about prior publication and copyright.

If your article is already published in a predatory journal, it can be very difficult to withdraw it and then submit it to a legitimate journal. If you cannot withdraw it, this unfortunately means that the published article may not count for academic or professional promotion purposes. Even if the APC was low, it was money wasted if your institution's evaluation authorities do not consider the journal suitable for academic or professional promotion purposes.

So before you choose a journal, you should ask your academic authorities if there is an official list of approved journals for researchers in your country, and verify that the journal is included in that list. **Be safe, don't be sorry!**