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### Teaching Authors about Predatory Journals in the One-on-One Consultation

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# Teaching Authors about Predatory Journals in the One-on-One Consultation

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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

This recipe guides academic librarians through author consultations related to predatory or questionable publishers. Lists of predatory journals provide quick answers to questions but leave authors in the dark. The focus of the consultation is to closely examine negative and positive indicators for a specific journal. Although it is valuable for authors to learn the signals of predatory journals, it is equally if not more important to emphasize tools like Think.Check.Submit that stimulate critical and analytical thinking about publishing choices. The consultation will result in a more empowered and scholarly information literate colleague and provides opportunities to introduce authors to important aspects of scholarly communications, particularly how to wisely choose a publisher. This recipe enables the librarian to be knowledgeable about the characteristics and behaviors of predatory journals. It also provides guidance on how to approach this challenging topic without being prescriptive and judgmental and confidently navigate difficult discussions that may arise.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

Librarians will learn the following:

- The most important characteristics and

signals of predatory journals (negative indicators)

- Positive indicators for journals, particularly open access journals, that all authors should know
- How to approach the consultation in an analytical manner without excessive judgment, establishing trust between the librarian and the author
- How to empower the author with critical discussion prompts
- About trusted tools that assist authors, particularly Think.Check.Submit
- To appreciate variation and complexity in predatory publishing practices through close analysis

## NUMBER SERVED

- 1 faculty author served per consultation
- 1 or 2 consultations per month may be normal

## COOKING TIME

- Prep time is typically 30 minutes to investigate the journal or publisher. This does not include the librarian's prep time needed to better understand predatory publishing.
- Cooking time for the consultation is typically 1 hour.

## DIETARY GUIDELINES

Predatory journals are characterized by a lack of transparency and unethical behaviors and typically do not follow standard editorial best practices. Authors who unintentionally publish in predatory journals have nightmarish experiences with editors and publishers. After publication, these authors may lose credit for their work because many colleges will not count these articles toward reappointment, tenure, or promotion. The author typically cannot republish the article with a legitimate journal. Even worse, the author's reputation may be damaged.

This recipe provides a pedagogical solution to predatory publishing, mitigating the problem of unintentional involvement and publication with questionable journals. Authors are also editors, peer reviewers, and evaluators. We want to support quality in editorial work, peer review, and all forms of evaluation, including internal and grant-related.

These consultations support the overall scholarly communications program on campus. The individualized interaction and the resulting relationship-building are much more difficult to achieve in workshops.

NASIG's Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians, Standard Five specifically includes evaluation of traditional and open access journals and teaches authors how to find new publishing venues.

### INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT

- A quiet, private office where the author can easily talk to the librarian and mutually look at computer screens
- A few trusted resources on hand, including DOAJ and Think.Check.Submit
- Handouts for the author for the end of the consultation

### PREPARATION

- Ask the author for details about the specific journal(s) the author is concerned about and any possible history with the journal(s).
- In advance of the consult, carefully examine the journal and publisher with a non-judgmental mind.
- Scan the author's prior publishing history and background.
- Ascertain which bibliographic databases map to the author's subject domain.

### COOKING METHOD

#### Part I: Gain trust and get the author's perspectives (10 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself and explain that you are here to help the author and that the conversation is confidential. The author may have already published in a predatory journal and has concerns after the fact but is not comfortable disclosing this

background. Assert that it can be very difficult to assess the quality of a journal and that it is not the librarian's job to make hard judgment calls on a journal as predatory or not predatory. Describe how the consultation will examine a variety of signals of predatory publishers as well as indicators of quality. Emphasize that journal publishing selection is a complex responsibility of every author. Remind the author of the importance of reaching out to experts who are the best judges of the quality of the journal. Assuage author apprehension.

2. Ask the author to tell the story of how they learned about the journal.
  - a. Did they receive an unsolicited email (spam) message? Spam messages not attached to a known organization should be concerning.
  - b. Did they find the journal through a Google search? The author should be wary of journals from unknown publishers. Explain how subject-specific bibliographic databases can be used to find target journals.
3. Ask the author for their impressions of the journal. Allow for open-ended responses, but also ask pointed questions. In particular, ask if the author
  - a. has read any articles in the journal, and, if so, their impressions;
  - b. knows any of the journal's authors;
  - c. knows any of the journal's editors; or
  - d. knows the publisher.

#### Part II: Dig into analysis (20–30 minutes)

1. Whether or not the author has devoted

time to examining the journal, undoubtedly more analysis is needed. Examine and critique as many of the following as time permits in order of priority:

- a. Is the journal hyper-focused on attracting authors to submit? Show specific examples of how predatory journals emphasize submission on the website. Related indicators include submission via a simple form that lacks editorial contacts as well as fawning and/or inappropriately familiar language on the publisher's website.
- b. Does the journal promise rapid peer review and publication? Remind the author that peer review often takes several months.
- c. Does the journal offer dubious bibliometrics? Some predatory journals try to trick authors by promoting faux bibliometric measures that have names similar to well-known metrics, e.g., Scientific Journal Impact Factor. Inclusion in Index Copernicus, which is widely considered to be predatory, is another signal. Predatory journals may claim indexing in SHERPA RoMEO.
- d. Does the journal lack a clearly articulated scope? Although predatory journals, particularly in biomedical fields, are increasingly specialized, many predatory journals lack focus in scope in an effort to attract any and every author.
- e. Does the journal lack an explicit peer review type? Predatory journals rarely specify the type of peer review used.

- f. Does the journal require article processing charges AND copyright transfer? It is not uncommon for predatory journals to require article processing charges *and* retain copyright with the publisher. Use of a Creative Commons license is not a meaningful positive or negative indicator.
- g. Question author fees. Beware of obscure publishers requiring article processing charges (APCs). Predatory publishers' information about fees may be misleading or unclear and they may require additional fees after acceptance or in order to withdraw. Be especially wary of publishers requiring authors to wire money to specific bank accounts.
- h. Does the journal falsely claim indexing in bibliographic databases? Cross-check claims. Be aware that low numbers of predatory journal articles have been indexed in PubMed and in Scopus.
- i. Does the journal or publisher falsely claim membership or inclusion in editorial organizations including the Open Access Scholarly Publisher's Association (OASPA), Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)? Cross-check claims, particularly related to inclusion in DOAJ. This is a great segue into sharing positive indicators.

Additional discussion points if time permits:

- j. Is important information missing or

vague, redundant, or contradictory?

- Missing or vague information. Predatory publishers often do not reveal a physical location or use a false physical location in a high-income country. Editorial board members, who often are unaware of being listed, may have only their country of residence provided, instead of full academic affiliations. Information about the publisher may be difficult to find. Instructions for authors will lack details or be vague or missing.
- Redundant information. Because predatory publishers often use boilerplate templates for journals, details about specific journals may be the same across the publisher's website.
- Contradictory information. Differing names for the publisher may be an attempt to elude detection. Author fees for a specific journal may differ as well.

- k. Copycat games. Is the journal's name or the name of the publisher similar to a well-known journal or publisher? Some predatory publishers try to trick authors by using titles that are similar to well-known journals or using words that are rearranged (e.g., the legitimate *Journal of A & B* as the predatory *Journal of B & A*).
2. Positive indicators to examine. Emphasize that the following are more meaningful than negative indicators. Always cross-check claims.
- a. Is contact information for the jour-

nal's editor and the publisher clear and readily found? Are author instructions and policies readily found?

- b. Does the journal or publisher address conflict of interest and other ethical standards, including plagiarism?
- c. Is the journal indexed in a subject-appropriate bibliographic database?
- d. Is the publisher/journal affiliated with a professional society, organization, or college/university? Compare predatory publishing to online dating. Would the author marry, let alone date, an unscrutinized, total stranger? Note that since some predatory publishers and editors are faculty at colleges and universities, affiliations may prove ambiguous.
- e. Is the publisher/journal a member of professional organizations for editors, e.g., World Association of Medical Editors, International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, International Academy of Nursing Editors, or Council of Science Editors? Ascertain if there is an editorial organization for the author's discipline and show the organization's website.
- f. Is the publisher/journal a member of OASPA or COPE?
- g. Is the journal included in DOAJ? DOAJ is very rigorous about its inclusion process and is heavily invested in supporting quality open access.

### Part III: Trusted tools and wrap-up (10–15 minutes)

1. DOAJ. Expand on DOAJ and show the

author its application/inclusion process. If time permits, explain that it purged predatory journals in 2017, requiring all journals to undergo a rigorous reapplication/application process. Point out that the majority of open access journals do not require an APC.

2. Think.Check.Submit (T.C.S). T.C.S. addresses key questions any author should ask in journal selection. It also touches on author awareness and the need to get support when needed from trusted colleagues. Assert that T.C.S. is the author's most important self-guided resource.
3. Learning from the literature. Reiterate the importance of the literature review. Encourage the author to identify core journals to read and to utilize for current awareness.
4. Suggest the author read a few articles from the journal post-consultation. Ask:
  - a. Is the writing clear and logical?
  - b. Is the methodology appropriate?
  - c. Were the articles copyedited?
5. Circle back to any concerning details the author shared.
6. Does the author have any questions?
7. Wrap up. Remind the author (again!) to seek help and get feedback about their publishing decisions from trusted colleagues, use T.C.S., and to always feel welcome to ask more questions and come back for more consultations. Give the author handouts.

#### ALLERGY WARNINGS

- Predatory journals can trigger strong

responses, and the chef needs to be prepared for awkward conversations.

- Remind authors that determining if a journal or publisher is predatory can be challenging and is subjective. Although the largest predatory publisher was successfully prosecuted by the Federal Trade Commission for documented deceptive and deceitful practices, other publishers and journals may simply suffer from amateurism. Caution that quality, stand-alone, and/or small scholar-led journals may not employ every journal best practice. These journals are unlikely to require APCs. If it arises, approach a discussion of Beall's List with extreme delicacy. Explain that Beall never opened up his process to others and that his list was controversial, resulting in his abrupt removal of it. Remind authors that lists are imperfect and that due diligence in journal selection is the author's responsibility.
- Be sensitive about the language of whitelists and blacklists as racist. If needed, explain that other language has not emerged to substitute. Do not generalize about predatory publishing as largely a problem for less-developed countries. Authors in high-income countries publish in predatory journals as well. Although non-standard English may be considered a signal of a predatory publisher, it is not, in and of itself, meaningful.
- Avoid making judgments about authorial intentionality as well as the quality of

the author's work if it is revealed that the author has already published in a likely predatory journal. Good-quality scholarship has been published in predatory journals.

- Lastly, minimize discussion of open access and APCs if possible. Many authors do not understand the various forms of open access or how they are sustained, and they may also conflate APCs, open access, and predatory publishing. Keep explanations about APCs simple. Frame the discussion around "bricks and mortar" infrastructure that large publishers subsidize, including rent for office space and salaries for editorial staff that copyedit and manage workflows, author portals, and other services that require staffing and technology. Explain to authors that APCs are usually built into large research grants in the sciences in order for research to be immediately open access as per funder requirements.

#### CLEAN-UP

Compliment your consultation with outreach that teaches authors how to select the target journal. Outreach via the subject liaison model may be especially effective. Prepare tips for your fellow librarians.

Learn more about editorial best practices. It is also beneficial to gain context about research misconduct as well as keep up with news about predatory publishing by following Retraction Watch.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

If the query is about a conference, focus on the organization behind the conference. Is it familiar? Most but not all academic conferences are sponsored by a scholarly society, professional organization, or other known entity. Some conferences fall into a gray area because they are for-profit and/or may be focused on maximizing attendance. Use Think.Check.Attend.

Offering a Scholarly Communications office hour or clinic encourages consultations.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES****Sources**

Grudniewicz, A., et al. (2019). Predatory journals: No definition, no defence. *Nature*, 576(7786), 210–212. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y>

Moher, D., et al. (2017). Stop this waste of people, animals and money. *Nature News*, 549(7670), 23. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1038/549023a>

Morrison, H. (2018, February 6). DOAJ APC information as of January 31, 2018. *Sustaining the Knowledge Commons / Soutenir Les Savoirs Communs*. Retrieved from <https://sustainingknowledgecommons.org/2018/02/06/doaj-apc-information-as-of-jan-31-2018/>

NASIG. (2017). *NASIG core competencies for scholarly communication librarians*. Retrieved from <https://www.nasig.org/Competencies-Scholarly-Communication>

Redhead, C. (2013, December 19). *Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing*. OASPA. Retrieved from <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing/>

**Links to LibGuides, handouts, applicable web pages, etc.**

Identifying Possible Predatory Journals for Authors. [Handout. Includes Predatory Journals Mythbusters. The PARSE is an acronym for our faculty annual evaluation report.]

[http://libguides.citytech.cuny.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=52603721](http://libguides.citytech.cuny.edu/ld.php?content_id=52603721)

Is this journal legitimate? A quick guide to evaluation. [Handout. Academic Works is our institutional repository.] [http://libguides.citytech.cuny.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=47822638](http://libguides.citytech.cuny.edu/ld.php?content_id=47822638)

Tips for subject liaisons in assisting with journal selection. <http://cityte.ch/ptj>

Think.Check.Submit. (T.C.S. links to Think.Check.Attend and has recently added a module for book chapters and monographs.) <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>

DOAJ and DOAJ's selection process. <https://doaj.org/> and <https://doaj.org/application/new>

COPE and OASPA. <https://publicationethics.org/> and <https://oaspa.org/>

Retraction Watch. <https://retractionwatch.com/>