

Caveat author: avoid opaque open access journals!

Jonathan Manley highlights the dangers posed by predatory journals and offers advice on how to check whether a publisher is trustworthy.

Have you ever received an email from an academic journal encouraging you to submit an article, and asking you to pay a fee to do so? If so, think twice before you submit!

We live in a golden age for publishing academic research. Authors are spoiled for choice with respect to available outlets, as never before. In the traditional corner stand books, academic journals, conference proceedings, society magazines, and bulletins; while blogs, discussion groups and scholarly collaboration networks beckon from the ether, to say nothing of YouTube, Twitter and Facebook.

Which outlet to choose for your own research? The prestige of publishing in a journal still holds the most appeal for many researchers, especially those whose heads of department or funders require it. What is more, funders are increasingly stipulating that the publications they indirectly support must be publicly available via 'Gold' Open Access. This is where the publisher makes the research free to access online, by anyone, at any time on publication, in return for a fee to cover the costs of publishing (the article publishing charge, or APC). Most journals (including many of those available only by subscription) offer authors this option.

The surge in open access publishing in recent years has brought many benefits to authors, funders and readers. But there is a downside: it has encouraged what appear at first to be legitimate publishers to approach potential authors in a way that risks the author being confused as to the provenance of the invitation, and being disappointed by the result of paying a fee and seeing their work published.

Jeffrey Beall, an American academic, was one of the first to spot this trend. He coined the term 'predatory' to describe these rogues:

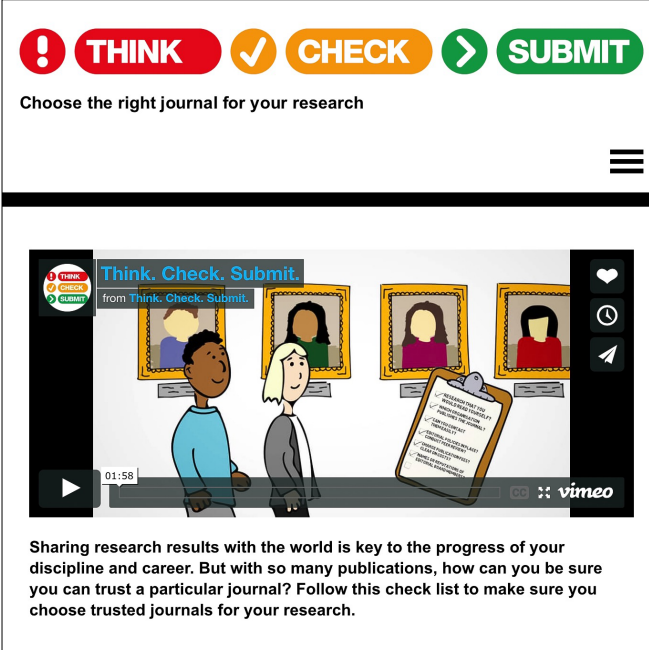
'I first became interested in questionable journals and publishers in 2008, when, as an assistant professor on tenure track, I began to receive ungrammatical spam emails from fishy-looking gold open access publishers, publishers I had never heard of before. I used to print them out and keep the printouts in a blue folder. I eventually drew up a short list of the suspicious publishers (this was really before mega-journals had appeared) and quietly published the list on an old blog I had.' (Beall quoted in Esposito, 2016)

'These publishers are predatory because their mission is not to promote, preserve, and make available scholarship; instead, their mission is to exploit the author-pays, Open-Access model for their own profit.' (Beall, 2010)

Professor Beall's list has since become the go-to resource for any author keen to check the credentials of a potential publisher. You can find it at <https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>

Case study: 'Journal of Sports Science'

The Editors of *Journal of Sports Sciences* and its publisher Taylor & Francis first became aware that a new open access journal entitled '*Journal of Sports Science*' had begun publishing in 2013. We noted with concern the title's similarity to the *Journal of Sports Sciences* (published by Routledge in association with BASES): only a final 's' separates them. In addition, a large section of the Aims & Scope of this new '*Journal of Sports Science*' appeared to be remarkably similar, to the extent that parts were verbatim, to the Aims & Scope of our own *Journal of Sports Sciences*.



Sharing research results with the world is key to the progress of your discipline and career. But with so many publications, how can you be sure you can trust a particular journal? Follow this check list to make sure you choose trusted journals for your research.

Given that the '*Journal of Sports Science*' used a similar title and a similar blurb, we worried that authors might be misled into believing they would be submitting to our own *Journal of Sports Sciences*, a journal with an established reputation and an Impact Factor. Our concern was increased when it became apparent that the '*Journal of Sports Science*' was emailing potential authors, encouraging them to submit. It prompted a number of them to contact us in bemusement.

Authors are of course free to submit where they choose, but it is our view that they should have an informed choice, not one clouded by an unwarranted and unauthorised association with an extant, successful journal, where an author can be assured of robust independent expert peer review and editing, high visibility, and high production and marketing values.

'*Journal of Sports Science*' chose not to address our concerns about confusing authors, and continues to publish today. As a result, we issued a communiqué to authors to clarify that there is no association between the two journals.

Regrettably, this is not an isolated example, and so the scholarly publishing community has launched an awareness-raising campaign: '**Think. Check. Submit.**' Devised by a coalition of publishers and industry organisations, this scheme alerts authors to the dangers posed by predatory journals and guides them in checking whether a publisher is trustworthy. Details can be found at: <http://thinkchecksubmit.org/>

The next time you are approached by an Open Access publisher, please remember to **T-C-S!** ■



Jonathan Manley

Jonathan is Publisher for Routledge, Taylor & Francis Sport and Leisure Journals. He has worked with BASES for 12 years publishing the *Journal of Sports Sciences*, one of the leading journals in the field.

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