Tips and Tricks for Identifying Predatory Journals

Have you ever received an email from a journal you have never heard of, promising to publish your research? Maybe the email contained typos or was from a journal in a completely different field than your own. You may have received an email from a predatory journal.

That email is one way to identify a journal as suspicious and as potentially predatory. Predatory publishing occurs when a journal charges a submission/publication fee without providing editorial services that meet the standard of academic publishing.

There is no universal way to identify a predatory journal; instead, you must carefully evaluate several aspects of the journal to determine how suspicious it is.¹ It is important to evaluate the quality of the journal holistically; if just one or two things about the journal seem suspicious, the journal may actually be reputable. However, if many aspects of the journal seem concerning, it may be best to submit your research elsewhere.

To evaluate a journal’s quality, you should ask yourself questions like:

- Do you and/or your colleagues know of the journal and/or members of its editorial board? Can you easily contact the journal’s publisher?
- Does the journal clearly list information about its peer review processes on its website?
- Does the journal clearly list information about its publishing fees on its website?
• Does the journal have an impact factor listed on its website? If so, does it match the official impact factor listed in the Journal Citation Reports database?
• Is the journal indexed in reputable databases like PubMed or Web of Science?
• Is the journal indexed in MEDLINE? (If you are unsure how to check if a journal is indexed in MEDLINE, watch this short video.)
• Is the journal listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)?

Many in-depth checklists can also be used to guide your evaluations, such as the one from Think. Check. Submit. These checklists provide several specific questions to ask yourself about a journal to determine whether you should publish in it. Another useful resource is Cabell’s Predatory Reports, which lists journals that have been identified as engaging in potentially problematic practices. If you find your journal is listed in there, it may be best to submit your research elsewhere.

If, after going through several checks, you are still unsure if a journal may be predatory, ask a librarian for help. Our librarians can help you identify predatory journals, and, if needed, find a reputable journal in your field.

Stay tuned! Next month, in the final issue in our series, we will cover some steps to take if you have mistakenly submitted to or published in a questionable journal.

References

The Fair Use Doctrine: When and How You Can Use Copyrighted Material

Imagine you’re preparing an educational presentation for an upcoming meeting and want to include a 1-minute segment from a YouTube video or a figure you came across in a medical journal. Can you use these?

The answer is, maybe.

First, you need to determine whether the material you wish to use is in the public domain or copyrighted (the University of Texas Libraries\(^1\) and US Copyright Office\(^2\) have tools that can help). Items in the public domain include federal government documents and works whose copyright has expired.\(^2\) Next, check whether the material is copyrighted under a Creative Commons license. Such licenses grant the public permission to use the material with various levels of restriction (e.g., CC BY means the work can be used if the creator is given credit; CC BY-NC means the work can be used if the creator is given credit and only for noncommercial purposes).\(^3\)

In the United States, as in most countries, copyright laws protect authors, photographers, artists, and other content creators from having their work used without permission.\(^4\) For example, if you want to use a figure from a copyrighted article in a medical journal, the copyright may be held by the journal or by the author, depending on the journal’s policy. To use the copyrighted figure, you may need to request permission by emailing the copyright holder directly or via a service such as Copyright Clearance Center; often a fee is charged for such permission. However, there are circumstances under which content can be used without permission from the copyright holder. Under US copyright law, such circumstances are determined by the fair use doctrine.

The US Copyright Office defines fair use as “a legal doctrine that promotes freedom of expression by permitting the unlicensed use of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances.”\(^5\) Whether a particular use of
A copyrighted work is fair use if determined by a holistic consideration of four factors:

- **The purpose and nature of the use.** In general, education and research are usually considered fair use, as are news reporting, reviews, and parody. "Transformative" use—that is, adding something new or using the copyrighted work in a way that changes its purpose—may be considered fair use. Nonprofit use is more likely to be considered fair use than commercial use.

- **The nature of the copyrighted work.** Using creative works such as songs or novels is less likely to be allowed under the fair use doctrine than fact-based works such as news reports or technical documents.

- **The portion of the copyrighted work that is used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole.** Using a 30-second clip from a movie to illustrate a point in a lecture is more likely to be considered fair use than would showing the movie in its entirety.

- **The use’s effect on the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.** For example, the fair use doctrine might allow a professor to show a copyrighted full-length film in a classroom setting—even a virtual/online classroom such as Zoom in some cases—but the film’s use might not be allowed if the online session is recorded because this could enable distribution of the film outside the classroom.

When courts must decide if a particular case constitutes fair use or copyright infringement, they consider all four of these factors. Guides such as Cornell University Library’s [Fair Use Checklist](https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/copyright) or Virginia Commonwealth University’s [Fair Use Diagram](https://www.copyright.gov) can help you determine whether your intended use would be considered fair use. If it seems uncertain whether the fair use doctrine applies to your intended use, the safest course of action is to request permission.

**References**


Library Staff-Contributed Publications 2023

The Research Medical Library advances cancer research and education within the MD Anderson community by meticulously curating and providing essential information. Collaborating closely with researchers and healthcare providers, librarians bring their expertise to literature searching, systematic reviews, and publication metrics. Scientific editors provide substantive editing and copy editing of various materials, including grant proposals and journal articles. In 2023, the Research Medical Library staff made contributions to 328 publications including original research, review articles, meeting abstracts, practice guidelines, letters, and editorial materials. Notably, approximately 8% of the library staff-contributed publications were featured in journals with an Impact Factor above 12. For more detailed information, refer to the RML-contributed publication report for the year 2023.
### Number of Publications by Impact Factor

![Pie chart showing the distribution of publications by impact factor tiers.](chart.png)

#### Impact Factor Tiers
- Tier 1 (12.001-999.99): 7.93%
- Tier 2 (6.001-12.0): 13.72%
- Tier 3 (2.6-6.0): 52.74%
- Tier 4 (1-2.599): 9.76%
- N/A: 15.85%

#### Journal List

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**Chat with a Librarian**

The library is here to help! If you need a quick response to a question, online chat is a great option. Go to the Research Medical Library website and click the blue “Ask Us" tab on the right-hand side of the page, fill out the short form, and click “start chat.” A librarian will chat with you to answer your question. If your question ends up being more in depth, we can easily switch over to Zoom to share screens and work through the question together.

Library staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Don’t see the blue “Ask Us” tab? You might be at the library’s storefront page via Inside. Our storefront page has our main resources and is a great place to visit; however, if you are looking for the online chat feature, you need to go to the library’s main website: www.mdanderson.org/library. We recommend bookmarking the page for quick access to our library resources and subscriptions.

All questions are welcome! Not sure where to start? View some of our Frequently Asked Questions to see what our library staff can help you with today.

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**The Final Word on Sacrificed, Killed, or Euthanized**

The humane treatment of laboratory animals is a legal and moral obligation and includes minimizing their pain and distress when they reach study endpoints. Choosing how to describe the killing of research animals in scientific publications can be complicated by the history, multiple meanings, or common usage of a word; by the need for clarity and concision; and by the expectations of audiences.
The use of the word *sacrifice* to describe the killing of lab animals began in the early 20th century. In historic usage, a *sacrifice* is a religious offering to a deity or, by extension, the act of “surrendering something valuable for a greater good.”¹ Thus, the use of *sacrificed* in biomedical research could be seen as a metaphor in which laboratory animals serve as offerings to the greater good of improving human health. Although scientific writing should ideally eschew the use of metaphors, *sacrifice* has come into widespread usage in the scientific literature. In fact, Merriam-Webster gives “to kill (an animal) as part of a scientific experiment” as one of the definitions of *sacrifice*,² and our recent search of PubMed for the term *sacrificed* retrieved over 50,000 results.

However, the *AMA Manual of Style* recommends that authors use the more direct term *killed* rather than *sacrificed* because *sacrificed* is a euphemism—a way of softening the expression of something unpleasant.³ For the same reason, the *AMA Manual* prefers the wording *the patient died* over the wording *the patient passed away*.

The professional and governmental bodies that oversee the welfare of research animals in the United States mostly use the term *euthanized*. AAALAC International, the organization that accredits research animal facilities, defines *euthanasia* as “the act of humanely killing animals by methods that induce rapid unconsciousness and death without pain or distress.”⁴ The *Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare* of the National Institutes of Health, the guidelines of the *American Veterinary Medical Association*, and the *ARRIVE guidelines* also use the terms *euthanasia* and *euthanized*.

In short, *sacrificed, killed, and euthanized* are all acceptable ways to describe the humane killing of lab animals. Authors should, however, consider their audience when they choose one of these terms. For broad audiences that may include nonscientists, *humanely killed* or *euthanized* may be preferable, as these audiences may not be familiar with the scientific usage of *sacrificed*.

References: