The Write Stuff

Boosting your writing into a higher orbit

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Information Security's "questionable journal" initiative flags potentially predatory publishers and sponsors

-- Kathryn Hale

The Information Security Department (InfoSec) and the Research Medical Library (RML) recently announced an initiative to flag incoming emails from "questionable," potentially predatory, sources offering opportunities for publication and conference presentation. Since December 2017, incoming emails from these carefully chosen sources have been screened automatically by InfoSec software and labeled "[QUESTIONABLE JOURNAL]" in the subject line. InfoSec's intent is to alert recipients and warn them about known and probable predatory publishers and conference sponsors.

Predatory is the term applied to companies that offer open access publishing and presenting opportunities to researchers in exchange for a substantial fee but offer none of the editorial or organizational services provided by legitimate publishers and conference sponsors. In the case of publishing, this fee is much higher than the article processing charges (APCs) required by many legitimate open access journals. These predatory companies are driven by profit and do not represent legitimate scholarly enterprises. Predatory publishers, for example, typically send emails promising rapid publication, charging large fees while providing minimal, if any, editorial services or peer review. They may issue a flattering email invitation to join a journal's editorial board, then without permission use the researcher's name, photo, credentials, and good reputation on their website to promote the journal. Predatory conference sponsors send emails offering researchers the opportunity to present their research at a "prestigious" international conference, for which the researcher pays a high fee. Researchers at MD Anderson are inundated with such emails. Responding to these offers may lead to anything from disappointment to embarrassment to out-and-out identify theft. Being affiliated with one of these companies may tarnish both the researcher's work and the intellectual property of the institution-not to mention the reputations of all involved.

But predatory publishers don't just harm reputations. They also cost the institution money. They eat into the productivity of researchers, who must spend time and effort differentiating these fraudulent publishers from legitimate publishers and sponsors important to both scientific progress and their career. Since payment of fraudulent publication fees with state or grant funds may open the researcher and the institution to censure, administrative staff have to be concerned with the legitimacy of all payees. The legal and compliance departments may have to get involved, upping the costs.

InfoSec enlisted the RML to help vet email sources and distinguish authentic, reputable publishers and sponsors from questionable ones. After thoroughly vetting InfoSec's initial list of suspect sources, the RML selected those that meet the criteria for questionable journals and/or conferences. (Since each of these publishers "publish" many journals, more than 100 journals are implicated.) The criteria include the following:

- Journal purports to be open access but is not listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (<u>https://DOAJ.org</u>)
- Journal is not indexed by PubMed, Scopus, EMBASE, or other reputable literature databases
- Journal is rarely, if ever, cited in legitimate research publications
- Journal website does not offer access to published issues, articles, or even tables of contents
- Journal has no editorial board, or the board is very small or "currently being formed"
- Journal charges unusually high publication fees or an upfront "submission" or "handling" fee
- Source claims a national or international affiliation that does not match its location or the makeup of its editorial board, or is not corroborated by the "affiliated" group
- Source does not offer contact information, or contact information is false or re-directed
- Source website is not of professional quality or does not exist

- Fees are not stated clearly and/or other details are vague
- Source makes unrealistic claims, such as extremely fast peer-reviewed publication or high impact factor for a journal, or very high-profile presenters at a conference
- Source solicits papers or presentations that have only a tenuous connection to the title/scope of the journal or conference

Not all predatory companies will fit all of these criteria, but these are signs that a source is questionable. The emails themselves often contain clues that they come from a questionable source:

- The email is unsolicited and the recipient has never heard of the journal/conference
- The email uses excessively flattering language
- The email is in plain text, with amateurish formatting and/or spelling and grammatical errors
- The email offers no contact name, phone, email, or website
- The email offers no "unsubscribe" or "opt out" option (a violation of the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003)

InfoSec expects to expand the list of questionable sources in the future. Readers who have questions about the authenticity of a particular source of emails concerning publishing or conference presentation may contact the RML staff for help (<u>RML-help@mdanderson.org</u>). Suggestions for sources, publishers, titles, or sponsors to be added to the InfoSec questionable sources list may be sent to <u>InfoSec@mdanderson.org</u> with the subject line "Possible Predatory Journal."

For more information about predatory journals: Wilcox C. <u>Predatory open-access journals</u>. *The Write Stuff*. Summer 2013; volume 10, no. 3.

Communicating with your editor to make the most of the help you receive

- Stephanie Deming

If you have a specific question or concern about a manuscript that you are sending to Scientific Publications for editing, we encourage you to let us know. Knowing your specific needs helps us provide the best possible service.

You can indicate questions and concerns in an email or in notes written in the manuscript—for example,

- "Is this sentence clear? I am trying to say that...."
- "I abbreviated this term because I had to reduce the length to 3000 words, but I don't like using the abbreviation. Can you suggest another way to reduce the word count?"
- "We need to come up with a name for this phenomenon that we have discovered. We are using *ABC* for now. Can you suggest a shorter term?"

- "We plan to submit another paper at the same time as this one, and we plan to use some of the Methods paragraphs from this paper in the other paper. Is this okay?"
- "The reviewers will use the abstract to decide which proposals proceed to second-round review. Can you help us make the abstract sound more exciting?"
- "I'm not sure I fully understand the difference between Significance and Innovation in the NIH model. Do you think I have put the right kind of information in each of these sections?"

For more complex questions or concerns, you might prefer to have a phone conversation with your editor. This can be arranged easily: when you submit the manuscript for editing, note in your email that you would like to talk with the editor before he or she begins work.

Also, if you don't understand a suggestion or comment that your editor has made in a manuscript, please don't hesitate to contact the editor and ask for clarification. We strive for clear communication and want to hear from you if anything is confusing.

NIH's Next Generation Researchers Initiative

– Amy Ninetto

Over the past two decades, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has increasingly recognized that early- and mid-career investigators face special challenges in securing research funding (1). The 21st Century Cures Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in December 2016, requires the NIH to create programs and policies "improving opportunities for new researchers and promoting earlier research independence" (2). Recently, the NIH announced the <u>Next</u> <u>Generation Researchers Initiative</u>, which gives special consideration to some grant applications from investigators who are still establishing their independent research careers and from those whose research programs are at risk of stalling because of a lack of financial support.

In fiscal year (FY) 2017, the NIH began to prioritize meritorious R01-equivalent grant applications from Early Stage Investigators (ESIs) and from certain Early Established Investigators (EEIs). An ESI is a Principal Investigator (PI) who completed his or her terminal research degree or clinical residency within the past 10 years and who has not previously competed successfully for a major NIH research award. An investigator can hold a small NIH grant, including an R03 (Small Research Grant), R21 (Exploratory/Developmental Grant), or any K award, and still be considered an ESI. A full list of NIH grants that do not affect ESI status can be found here. An EEI is a PI who received his or her first independent NIH R01-equivalent award within the past 10 years. All applications from ESIs will be given priority consideration for funding. Applications from EEIs will be given priority consideration if the EEI has lost or is at risk of losing all NIH research support if not funded this year, or if the EEI is supported by only one active award. An application with multiple PIs will be given priority consideration only if all PIs are either ESIs or EEIs meeting the aforementioned criteria.

In effect, this new initiative means that the "payline"—the percentile ranking cutoff point for funding—will be lower for ESIs and qualifying EEIs than for other investigators. For example, applications from established investigators who have already won multiple R01-equivalent grants may be funded if they are ranked in the top 9% of applications, but applications from ESIs and qualifying EEIs may be funded at the 20% level. With these changes, the NIH aimed

to fund 200 more ESI awards and 200 more EEI awards in FY 2017 than it did in FY 2016 which translates to an increase in funding of about \$210 million for ESIs and EEIs combined (1).

Extensions to the 10-year time frame can be granted for time spent away from research because of disability, medical concerns, family care responsibilities, active duty military service, natural disasters, and certain other special circumstances.

All investigators should check <u>eRA Commons</u> well in advance of grant application deadlines to confirm that their relevant dates and other information are accurate. The NIH will automatically apply ESI or EEI status on the basis of the information entered there.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the Next Generation Researchers Initiative can be found <u>here</u>.

References

1. Lauer M, Tabak L, Collins F. Opinion: The Next Generation Researchers Initiative at NIH. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 2017;114:11801-11803. Available at http://www.pnas.org/content/114/45/11801.full. Accessed November 20, 2017.

2. 21st Century Cures Act. Pub L No. 114-255, 130 Stat 1051. Available at: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ255/pdf/PLAW-114publ255.pdf. Accessed November 20, 2017.

Scientific Publications offers writing consultation services

Erica Goodoff

You are likely familiar with the editing services provided by the Department of Scientific Publications. But did you know that editors in the department can also help you with a paper while you are still writing it? Whether you are just getting started with an outline or wondering what to do next with your rough draft, you can contact the department to meet with an editor, either in person or by phone, for a one-on-one consultation. These appointments can usually be arranged within a day, and editors can meet with an author as many times as needed before the paper is ready for a full edit. In addition, if you just have a question about publishing, word usage, grammar, or a similar topic, feel free to call the main office at 713-792-3305 or email scientificpublications@mdanderson.org.

Getting to know the NIH grant programs

– Joe Munch

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has numerous grant programs designed to support research and research-related activities that are in line with its mission of "seek[ing] fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability." Each grant program, designated by a letter and number, has a different purpose.

Many of these programs provide funding to individual applicants seeking to advance their research careers:

- Most Research Grants (R series) are designed to help independent researchers carry out projects ranging from exploratory studies to long-term investigations. Research Project Grants (R01) support investigators undertaking "discrete, specified, circumscribed project[s]" in their specific area of interest. Small Research Grants (R03) support small projects that can be executed quickly, such as pilot and feasibility studies; such grants can also be used to develop new methodologies and technologies. Exploratory/Developmental Research Grants (R21) support "high-risk, high-return" projects that could establish the conceptual foundations of new research areas or lead to breakthroughs in established fields. Other Research Grants support scientific conferences and meetings (R13) and clinical trial planning (R34).
- Career Development Awards (K series) help candidates become independent researchers who can develop projects that are competitive for major grant support (such as R01 grant support). The awards are typically given to postdoctoral fellows moving to faculty positions or to established faculty members moving to new or additional research areas. Mentored Research Scientist Career Development Awards (K01) support postdoctoral trainees and occasionally others needing experience and protected time to transition to research independence, such as researchers looking to train in a new field or those returning to a research career after a long hiatus. Independent Research Scientist Development Awards (K02) enable newly independent researchers to pursue intensive research that would help increase their likelihood of having an impact in their field. Midcareer Investigator Awards in Patient-Oriented Research (K24) give faculty members (typically at the associate professor level) protected time to perform clinical research and/or expand their mentoring of clinical residents, fellows, and junior faculty.
- Pathway to Independence Awards (K99/R00), which bridge the K and R series, support mentored postdoctoral trainees transitioning to a tenure-track faculty position.
- Fellowships (F series) can help students attain dual doctoral degrees (F30) or undertake mentored research training (F31). They can also help postdoctoral trainees enhance their research training to increase their likelihood of becoming independent researchers (F32) and help experienced scientists change or broaden the scope of their research (F33).
 International Research Fellowships (F05) support international scientists and clinicians training at U.S. institutions.
- Predoctoral to Postdoctoral Fellow Transition Awards (F99/K00), which bridge the F and K series, are aimed at helping graduate students become postdoctoral trainees.

Other NIH grant programs provide support for large, multi-team projects at the institutional level:

Research Training Grants (T series) help institutions establish or enhance their training programs and opportunities. Examples include Ruth L. Kirschstein Institutional National Research Service Awards (T32), which help institutions recruit pre- and postdoctoral trainees in certain understaffed research areas, and Continuing Education Training Grants (T15), which help professional schools initiate or improve their continuing education programs.

- **Program Project/Center Grants (P series)** support large research efforts that include multiple projects and diverse activities across an institution.
- Resource Grants (various series) help institutions establish or enhance their research infrastructure and/or training opportunities.

For more information about NIH grant programs, go to https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/funding_program.htm.

Unusual terms used in scientific writing and publishing: Gold, platinum, and green open access

– Bryan Tutt

Open access publishing, in which manuscripts from scientific and academic journals are made available at no charge to the public, originated in the 1990s as an alternative to the traditional subscription-based model for covering publication costs. Since then, several open access models have emerged. These are referred to as the gold, platinum, and green models, and the chief difference between them is their funding mechanisms.

The gold model is the most commonly used open access model. In the gold model, authors must pay an article processing charge (APC), typically \$2,000 to \$3,000, to the journal. Although many legitimate journals have adopted the gold model, some unscrupulous or "predatory" publishers use the gold model to prey upon researchers who are eager to have their work published. Predatory journals sometimes charge APCs that are much higher or much lower than the APCs typically charged by legitimate journals, but the predatory journals provide little or no peer review (see <u>"Unusual terms used in scientific writing and publishing: Predatory journals, misleading metrics, and other publishing hazards,"</u> *The Write Stuff*, Winter 2017).

The platinum model, sometimes called the diamond model, emerged as a solution to the problems of high APCs and predatory publishing endemic to the gold open access model. In the platinum model, publication costs are funded by someone other than readers or authors. This funding typically comes from universities, charitable foundations, or other nonprofit organizations.

Green open access refers to institutional or public repositories or servers on which articles can be accessed free of charge after publication in either a subscription-based or open access journal, often after an embargo period. PubMed Central is an example of a green open access repository. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) requires reports of NIH-funded research to be submitted to PubMed Central within 12 months of publication in a peer-reviewed journal (see <u>NIH Public Access Policy</u>). A variation of the green open access model is preprint servers, on which articles can be made available before peer review. The repositories or servers used in the green model may be funded by government agencies, universities, or charitable foundations.

For the time being, the three open access models will continue to coexist, along with the traditional subscription-based model for scientific publishing. The field of publishing continues to evolve, so it remains to be seen whether one model will emerge as dominant.

Sources

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Upcoming events for authors

Please see the <u>Scientific Publications</u> website for more information on our educational courses.

Third Thursday Writing Retreat. The Department of Scientific Publications and the Research Medical Library are sponsoring afternoon writing retreats for faculty and trainees. These retreats, offered the third Thursday of every month from 12 to 4 pm in the Research Medical Library conference room (FCT21.6040), allow 4 hours of protected time for researchers to work on their grants and manuscripts. A scientific editor is present the entire time to answer questions, offer advice, and provide consultations on early drafts. (A separate room is available for lengthy consultations.) A librarian is also present to help with literature searches, reference formatting, EndNote issues, etc. *Details: John McCool (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org),* 713-792-3174.

February 15, 2018 March 15, 2018 April 19, 2018

Writing and Publishing Scientific Articles (WAPSA). WAPSA is a structured, practical, indepth writing-education program for postdoctoral fellows and clinical trainees of MD Anderson taught by the Department of Scientific Publications. This 16-contact-hour course provides an excellent opportunity for advancing participants' skills in writing and publishing research articles while developing their in-progress manuscripts under the guidance of scientific editors. Locations and times to be announced. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications. Details: John McCool (<u>scipubseducation@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-3174.

February 20 and 27, 2018 May 3 and 10, 2018

Short Courses in Scientific English for Non-Native Speakers of English. Courses last 7 weeks and meet twice a week for 1 or 1.5 hours each day. Classes are held early in the morning, during the lunch hour, or late in the afternoon. Classes are free of charge. Participants must speak English at the intermediate or higher level and be familiar with research and general biomedical terminology.

Dates are subject to change. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications and ends February 22. Details: Mark Picus (<u>mapicus@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-7251, or John McCool (<u>scipubseducation@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-3174.

Session 2 – March 12 through April 26, 2018

Pronunciation 1, Pronunciation 2, Conversation 1, Conversation 2, Writing 3

Friday Conversation Group. The Friday Conversation Group provides an informal atmosphere for non-native speakers of English to practice their conversational abilities, learn more about American culture, and meet new friends. The class meets every Friday in the Mitchell Building (BSRB), room S3.8003, from 12:00 to 1:00 pm.

No registration is required. Details: Mark Picus (<u>mapicus@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-7251, or John McCool (<u>scipubseducation@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-3174.

Writing Persuasive R01 Proposals. This grant-writing workshop for clinical and basic science research faculty at MD Anderson focuses on the content, organization, and structure of an R01 grant application. Taught by senior editors in the Department of Scientific Publications, this 1-day workshop includes lecture, discussion, and guided grant outlining and development.

Locations and times to be announced. Registration required through the Department of Scientific Publications. Details: John McCool (<u>scipubseducation@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-3174.

March 21, 2018 June 12, 2018

Writing the Discussion Section of a Scientific Manuscript. In this presentation, Bryan Tutt, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, will discuss and give tips on how to write an effective Discussion section of a scientific manuscript.

No prior registration is required. Details: John McCool (<u>scipubseducation@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-792-3174.

March 27, 2018, 12-1 pm, Pickens Tower, FCT3 (rooms 3, 4, 5, 6)

Scientific Publications Now Charging No-Show Fees. Scientific Publications' popular full-day courses—Writing and Publishing Scientific Articles, Writing Scientific Articles, and Writing Persuasive R01 Proposals—are available to MD Anderson faculty and trainees free of charge. For many courses, we have more applicants than spaces available; and sometimes those accepted do not show up for the courses. Therefore, to ensure that as many faculty and trainees as possible can participate in our courses, we implemented a new cancellation/no-show policy. Registrants are able to drop a course without penalty until a specified date and time (typically 2 work days before the course begins), but those who do not withdraw from the course by that deadline and who do not show up for the course will be charged \$95 to the chart string provided at the time of registration.

Webinars Presented by the Department of Scientific Publications. The Department of Scientific Publications continues to host a series of webinars on various topics, including the following:

• Creating Effective Graphs – January 31, 2018, 11:30 am

In this webinar, Sunita Patterson, a senior scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, will review the fundamentals of good graph design and data presentation.

• Choosing a Journal – March 20, 2018, 11:30 am

In this webinar, Stephanie Deming, a senior scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, will discuss strategies for selecting a journal and avoiding disreputable journals.

Dates and times, as well as links to upcoming webinars, will be posted as they become available on the <u>Department of Scientific Publications</u> website and in the department's "Educational Events" newsletter.

The following webinars have already been presented and recorded:

• Addressing ESL Issues in Scientific Writing (presented November 9, 2017)

In this webinar, Mark Picus, PhD, training specialist, and Ann Sutton, scientific editor, both in the Department of Scientific Publications, discuss some of the challenges in scientific writing that scientists who trained at institutions outside the United States are likely to encounter as they transition to working at a U.S.-based institution. A <u>recording of the webinar</u> is available.

• Avoiding Wordiness (presented October 4, 2017)

In this webinar, Don Norwood, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, explains how to identify wordiness—the use of too many words to express an idea—and shares strategies for eliminating it from scientific writing. A <u>recording of the webinar</u> is available.

• Ask the Editors (presented July 26, 2017)

In this webinar, two editors in the Department of Scientific Publications field questions about writing, editing, and publishing. A <u>recording of the webinar</u> is available.

• Avoiding Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism (presented April 19, 2017)

In this webinar, two scientific editors in the Department of Scientific Publications discuss the pitfalls of plagiarism, how plagiarism is detected, and how authors can avoid plagiarizing. The concept of "self-plagiarism" is also discussed. A <u>recording of the webinar</u> and the <u>webinar slides</u> are available.

• Creating Effective Tables (presented January 19, 2017)

In this webinar, Joe Munch, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, discusses when to use a table, the elements of a table, some basic principles of effective table design, and how to use Microsoft Word to design a clear and useful table. A <u>recording of the webinar</u> and the <u>webinar slides</u> are available.

Grant Writing Advice. The Department of Scientific Publications now offers grant writing suggestions (Writing R01 Grant Proposals) in the Writing Advice section of our website. This information, stemming from the Grant Writers' Seminars and Workshops (developed by Drs. Stephen Russell and David Morrison and presented annually at MD Anderson) and from the NIH's SF424 (R&R) Application Guide, focuses on R01 grants but can be applied to other types of NIH grants as well.

Writing the Specific Aims Section of a Grant Application. In this video, Sunita Patterson, senior scientific editor, presents a summary of the National Institutes of Health's grant-review process and how it affects the grant proposal, an overview of the structure of an R01 grant proposal, and a model for writing the Specific Aims section. The <u>video</u> is available on the Scientific Publications website.

Writing Abstracts Online Tutorial. <u>Writing Abstracts</u>, an interactive, Web-based tutorial, covers the most important aspects of writing good abstracts. The lesson includes many examples and an optional self-assessment.

Improve Your Chances for IRG Funding. This <u>PDF presentation</u> by Walter Pagel, the former Director of the Department of Scientific Publications, guides researchers through the process of applying for institutional research grants.

Anatomy of a Research Article Video Presentation. In this <u>video</u>, Stephanie Deming, senior scientific editor, presents advice on writing the parts of a research article: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, title, and abstract. The <u>slides shown in the presentation</u> and the <u>presentation handout</u> can be downloaded as well.

Classes and Webinars Presented by the Research Medical Library. More classes will be posted on the <u>Research Medical Library</u> website once they have been finalized.

Classes are located in the Research Medical Library classroom in the Pickens Academic Tower (in either FCT21.6008 or FCT21.6040). Details: Laurissa Gann (<u>lgann@mdanderson.org</u>), 713-794-1111.

February 1, 9:30 am, class: EndNote Basics

February 8, 9:30 am, class: EndNote Advanced

February 9, 9:30 am, class: Literature Reviews

February 14, 11:00 am, webinar: Clinical Information Resources - Find Answers Fast

February 21, 9:30 am, class: PubMed Basics

March 6, 10:30 am, class: Planning Your Systematic Review

March 7, 11:00 am, class: PubMed for Advanced Searchers

March 13, 11:00 am, class: EndNote Basics

March 20, 11:00 am, class: EndNote Advanced

April 11, 10:00 am, class: Library Essentials for Administrative Assistants

April 18, 10:00 am, class: EndNote Basics

April 19, 2:30 pm, class: Literature Reviews

April 25, 10:00 am, class: EndNote Advanced

To register for a Research Medical Library webinar or class, please visit the library's <u>Class</u> <u>Calendar</u>. When you click on a webinar or class link on the calendar, you will be directed to a registration screen. Also at this site are class and webinar descriptions and printable handouts.

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