

Choosing a journal, avoiding predatory ones

A practical guide to shortlisting reputable, well-matched journals, and recognising the warning signs of predatory publishers.

Step 1: Define what you need

- Who should read your paper: specialists in one field, a broader clinical audience, or researchers across disciplines?
- What article type you are submitting, and whether the journal publishes it (for example, case reports or short communications).
- Your priorities: speed of decision, indexing, open access, cost, or reach within your specialty.

Step 2: Build a shortlist

- Look at where the key papers you cite were published; these journals already publish work like yours.
- Read each journal's aims and scope, and a few recent articles, to confirm your paper fits.
- Check indexing directly in the databases (Web of Science Master Journal List, Scopus, PubMed/MEDLINE), not only on the journal's website.
- For open-access journals, check whether they are listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).
- Check whether the publisher is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Step 3: Compare the practical details

- Article processing charges (APCs), and any waivers or institutional agreements that cover them.
- Typical time to first decision and to publication, if stated.
- Word and figure limits, required reporting guidelines, and formatting requirements.
- Policies on preprints, data sharing and use of AI tools.
- Peer review type, and whether the journal allows transfer to a sister journal after rejection.

Warning signs of a predatory journal

- Unsolicited, flattering emails inviting you to submit, often outside your field.
- Promises of guaranteed acceptance or peer review within a few days.
- Unclear, hidden or surprisingly low or high fees, revealed only after acceptance.
- Invented or misleading metrics in place of recognised indexing.
- A very broad scope that combines unrelated fields in one journal.
- An editorial board that cannot be verified, or members who do not know they are listed.
- A journal name or website closely imitating a well-known journal, which can indicate a hijacked journal.
- Poorly written website, missing contact address, or no clear peer review policy.
- Claims of indexing that do not appear when you search the database yourself.

If you are unsure

- Use the Think. Check. Submit. checklist (thinkchecksubmit.org) to assess any journal.
- Ask your supervisor, a senior colleague or your institution's library or research office.
- When in doubt, do not submit. Withdrawing a paper from a predatory journal can be difficult.

Need a second pair of eyes? KR Publication Support offers manuscript assessments, editing, and reviewer response support for researchers and clinicians.