



How to Protect Yourself from Predatory Publishers and Other Common Open Access Questions

SGS is a proud sponsor of *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine (GGM)*, an open access journal from SAGE Publishing. Both SGS and SAGE frequently get questions from SGS members wary of open access and hesitant to submit their work to *GGM* for this reason. Natalie Gerson, Open Access Publishing Editor at SAGE, responds to some of the most common questions and concerns surrounding open access.

Thanks to PLOS One, PeerJ, CHORUS, and even the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, open access has become a familiar concept to researchers and academics. Unfortunately, a fair amount of that familiarity is due to the highly publicized negative aspects of open access, leaving researchers with an understandable wariness of the idea. Concerns abound, ranging from predatory publishers to “pay to publish” to peer review quality. In reality however, open access as a publishing model offers its own range of benefits. Arming yourself with just a bit of information can help you successfully navigate the open access landscape, and easily avoid the commonly feared pitfalls.

To get started, let’s look at the benefits of publishing open access:

- **Increased visibility.** With access not restricted to paying subscribers, anyone with internet can view and download your research. This allows for wider and faster impact, as well as enhanced collaboration. Studies have shown increased citations to open access content, and science itself moves forward faster when content is not limited to those who can pay.
- **Increased access.** Subscription journals limit their audience to those who can afford a subscription, or are part of an institution that subscribes to the journal. This excludes a good portion of the population, including independent researchers, retired academics, and most importantly, researchers in lower income countries. Open access content is available to everyone, regardless of their financial situation
- **Author retains copyright.** Most OA content is published under a Creative Commons (or similar) license, which allows the author to retain more control over and rights to distribute and re-use their intellectual property. For full details on the different kinds of CC licenses and their uses, check out the very informative [Creative Commons website](#)

- **Meeting funder requirements.** More funders are making open access publishing a requirement for funding. Publishing in an open access journal easily fulfills those requirements
- Finally, in many countries a lot of research is ultimately funded by tax dollars. Open access gives the public access to content they have contributed towards without requiring further subscription payments

Open access has some definite benefits. But what about the negatives? Let's take a look at some of the most common concerns.

Predatory Publishers

New open access titles appear every day. We've all read the horror stories of journals with fake editorial boards (or worse, academics added to boards without their knowledge or consent), journals that will publish anything so long as you pay a fee, and journals without any peer review to speak of. Some predatory publishers even mimic titles of existing quality, peer-reviewed journals. As unnerving as this is, a few simple tips can help you differentiate the good players from the bad:

- **Consult a white list.** There are sites that list trustworthy open access journals and publishers. The [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) is an excellent resource with very strict parameters for inclusion. DOAJ links directly to the journal, so you can be sure you're not submitting to a mimic.
- **Trust reputable publishers.** If you already know and trust the publisher and would submit to one of their subscription titles, you can trust their open access content as well. If you cannot easily identify and contact the publisher from the journal webpage, this is a red flag. For instance, if you come across a website for *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine* and the SAGE logo and branding is not prominently displayed, you are likely on a predatory website.
- **Check the guidelines.** Author instructions should clearly state the journal's ethical and peer review guidelines, as well as the Article Processing Charge (APC). If any of this information is missing, exercise caution.
- **Check indexes.** Journal content appearing in reputable indexes (such as PubMed or Scopus) is a good sign, as is the journal being a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Always check the actual index, rather than relying on any claims on the journal website.
- **Verify editorial board members.** Are you able to find editorial board member's credentials online? Are their institutions listed on the journal's website, and can you then find their faculty page at that institution? When in doubt, contact an editorial board member through their institution's page to confirm their board membership.

Article Processing Charges (APCs) and Peer Review

While OA titles are free for the user, there are costs at every stage of the publication process, including but not limited to operating submission and peer-review platforms, copyediting and typesetting, hosting the article in perpetuity on dedicated servers, and marketing. Since OA titles do not charge subscription fees, they need another way to be financially sustainable. Many OA journals charge a one-time Article Processing Charge (APC), which the author is responsible for upon acceptance. APCs vary from journal to journal, and discounts may be available. Many funders and institutions are willing to cover their researchers' APCs and have set funds aside for this purpose.

A frequently voiced concern is that this author-pays model is vanity publishing, or “pay to publish”. With revenue generated by accepted papers, editorial integrity is called into question. What prevents a journal from accepting everything, regardless of quality?

SAGE addresses this problem by completely separating the editorial and commerce aspects of the submission process. Content is purely under the jurisdiction of the editor(s), and APCs are only collected after an article has been accepted. OA titles are held to the same rigorous peer review standards as subscription titles, with a minimum of two expert reviewers being required, and many OA titles have high rejection rates. Discounts and waivers are also available to authors from lower income countries. Our peer review and ethics policies are clearly outlined in the author instructions.

It is interesting (and ironic) to note that the one-time APC is often cheaper than publishing in a traditional journal with no APC. Once you take into account page charges (around \$300/page after the first few pages), color figure fees (ranging from \$400-\$1500 per figure), and other costs (for example, supplementary material fees at \$250), the price to publish in a standard journal can easily exceed the price of an open access APC.

SAGE and *GGM* are honored by the support SGS gives to the journal. Aside from the standard advantages of open access mentioned above, below are some of the specific benefits of publishing in *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*:

- [Indexed in the DOAJ](#) (Directory of Open Access Journals) and [PubMed Central](#)
- [A member of COPE](#)
- Rigorous double-blind peer review
- High rejection rate-only ~40% of articles are accepted
- Fantastic team of editors-Ronald Hamdy, Debra Dobbs, and Ravishankar Jayadevappa
- Low APC-at \$1200, this is one of the lower APCs in the field. In *Gerontology*, the average APC for open access titles is around \$1800
- **As a SGS member, you are entitled to a 25% discount on the APC-that's \$900 instead of the full price of \$1200**

Please feel free to direct any questions about *GGM* or open access in general to Natalie at Natalie.gerson@sagepub.com

The *GGM* journal website: <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ggm>

GGM instructions to authors: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/gerontology-and-geriatric-medicine#submission-guidelines>

GGM submission site: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ggm>