

Requests to Be a Content Expert Reviewer for Journals I Am Not Affiliated With: A Major, Ongoing Problem for the Academic Community

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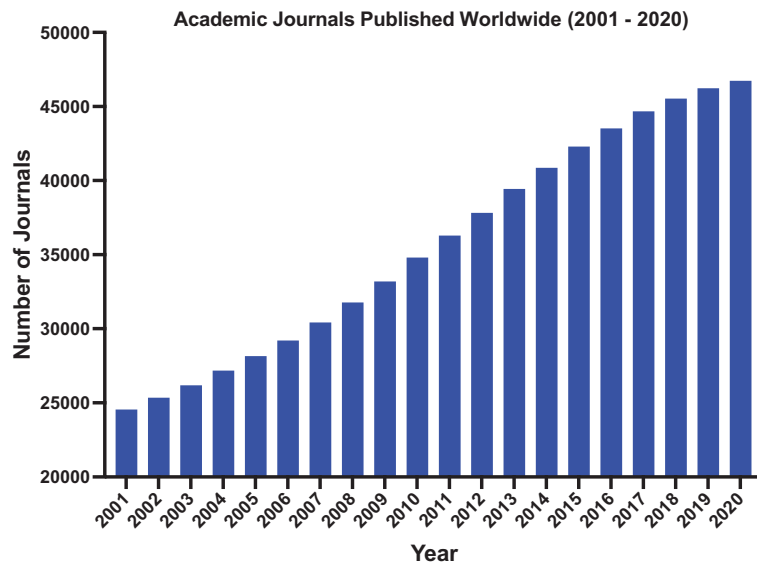
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I challenge you to name another situation in which a business, making a few thousand dollars of profit for a transaction, asks a random citizen (unsolicited random citizen) to do the intellectual work to justify that transaction and expects that intellectual work to be done for free. Clearly, law, retail, construction, finance, and manufacturing wouldn't tolerate this relationship. The only example I can think of is scientific publishing. Journals send manuscripts without any permission and ask you, the scientist and health care professional, to spend a few hours reviewing the manuscript so they can then publish the paper and charge the author. This was fine when there were a handful of journals in your field, but with open-access online journals, the number of review requests has become overwhelming. The other day, I got 3 differ-

ent requests (meaning 3 separate manuscripts) from the same journal on the same day. And to be clear, I had never heard of the journal. Another journal kept sending me requests to review manuscripts (most outside my area of expertise), and I kept sending messages that I didn't have time to review for them. I looked through my email history; they had sent me different manuscripts almost daily for the past 3 months. Valuable time is wasted responding to these unsolicited emails. The only solution I can think of is to block the publisher.

There are more than 46,000 academic journals (from approximately 2000 publishers), and the annual growth rate is about 6% (see Figure).^{1,2} The hallmark of a scholarly journal is a peer review process, meaning the manuscripts submitted to the journal have been

Figure. Caption



The number of journals world-wide has increased by 35% over ten years (2010 to 2020)¹. In 2020, 46,736 academic journals were published worldwide, with 75% published in English.

reviewed by a handful of experts in the field to assess the paper before it is published. That sounds great, but I am a pharmacologist in the oncology field with a specific interest in prostate cancer. I've received requests to peer review food science, material science, and plant science manuscripts. I've received papers on physics and nutrition. To put a finer touch on those requests, they were all from open-access, lower-impact journals. So, is that really "peer review?"

More than 5.1 million articles are published annually (increasing by approximately 3% annually). China leads the way with over 1 million manuscripts published annually, and roughly 20% of all academic papers come from China.¹ A few years ago, Publons was created to give academic credit to those who assist in the peer review process. But what does that do? If I accepted all the peer review requests I received and honestly spent the appropriate time reviewing the manuscript, I would have no time left to do my work. Please don't think I'm suggesting the reviewers should be paid for their time, but I am saying the for-profit journals are taking advantage of us. This system is broken and is only getting worse.

Editor's Note: Dr. Figg addresses an increasingly challenging problem confronting content experts willing to commit their scarce time to critically evaluate submitted manuscripts to legitimate, peer-reviewed Journals. The paper in this Issue by Johnson and Miller addresses important concepts to the preparation of an effective, comprehensive, constructive reviewer comments for editors consideration. Please note that *JPPT* never sends submitted manuscripts to potential reviewers who are not already within our reviewer approved database. When I determine reviewers outside of our approved reviewer pool would add to the peer-review process, I always send the identified expert an invitation letter describing important aspects regarding the submitted paper AND requesting their interest and permission to serve as a *JPPT* reviewer. *JPPT* never sends unsolicited to unknowing potential content expert peer-reviewers as described by Dr. Figg. I must confess that I too receive such requests and I am sure many of our readers as well – a problem needing resolution.

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