

# Spotting Online Scammers

Prepared for SCBWI Members by Jonathan Schnapp, West/Central NY (<https://westcentny.scbwi.org/>)

---

It's becoming increasingly important to know how to be safe and cautious on the internet. It's a sad fact that there are those out there looking for new ways to steal your information, your identity, your money, or even your intellectual property (e.g. your manuscripts or illustrations). The following is one example of how I determined a job offer was a scam.

As an illustrator I occasionally receive the odd request for commissions through my website or email. (Often something like "Your work rocks! Could you draw a picture of my dog dressed as Captain America?") But sometimes I receive messages like this:

Name: ROY

Message: My name is Roy, I am an academic event organizer and an Apraxia patient. I got your contact details online. I need the service of an artist or illustrator/cartoonist to work on a project for an upcoming workshop. I will give the idea of what I need to be illustrated/drawn and you can get back to me with the price to get it done. I will pay your fees up front if you want.

Warm regards

Email: [roywaynerodgers91@outlook.com](mailto:roywaynerodgers91@outlook.com)

Subject: ILLUSTRATION JOB OFFER

Sounds great, right? My interest was certainly piqued. It reads innocent enough, but let's take a closer look:

Name: ROY

Message: My name is Roy, I am an academic event organizer and an Apraxia patient. I got your contact details online. I need the service of an artist or illustrator/cartoonist to work on a project for an upcoming workshop. I will give the idea of what I need to be illustrated/drawn and you can get back to me with the price to get it done. I will pay your fees up front if you want.

Warm regards

Email: [roywaynerodgers91@outlook.com](mailto:roywaynerodgers91@outlook.com)

Subject: ILLUSTRATION JOB OFFER

No last name?  
Not very professional!

Roy does not actually comment on my work. What drew him to me specifically?

Academic? What school or university?

Apraxia patient? This is an odd detail to include unless the workshop is about Apraxia.

What is the workshop about?

Personal email address was used, despite claiming to be an academic event organizer.

The key is to be a professional in these communications. There are no dealbreakers here in this email, but there is enough to put one on guard. Not knowing this was a common email scam going around, I replied, giving the benefit of the doubt that Roy may not be the best at email writing:

 **Jonathan Schnapp** Jan 19, 2022, 10:49 AM (8 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

to roywaynerodgers91 ▾

Good morning Roy!

Thank you for checking out my website and reaching out. I'd be happy to hear more about your project. I can put together a quote for you, but first I'd appreciate some additional information:

- What is your timeline? (I'm currently wrapping up a project and likely won't be available for a few more weeks, in case that won't work for you.)
- What is the scope of the project? (Number of images, but also if they are for print or digital presentation, sizes, etc.)
- What are you thinking in regards to style? (Since you've seen my website, I'm hoping you already think my style of work is appropriate, but additionally if you're thinking about color. vs black and white, etc. If you can reference a piece or two from my portfolio that caught your eye, that would be most helpful.)
- Do you have budget constraints? If possible, I will work with you to meet any financial limitations you might have.

Looking forward to hearing more about your workshop!

-Jon

My reply was meant to come across as “professional,” but also secretly I wanted to probe the sincerity of the situation. Has “Roy” seen my work? Do they know what my style is? Do they have critical details regarding the project for me to work with them?

Interestingly, I did get a follow up. I will go ahead and jump straight to highlighting the red flags:

**Roy Rodgers**  
to me

Jan 24, 2022, 3:00 PM (3 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello Jon,

Thank you for your interest in this project. These illustrations are to be used for a presentation in a Workshop coming up soon. **The title of the workshop is PANDEMIC : PRECAUTION AND PREVENTION.** The attendees are students between the ages of 15-17. I require your service to illustrate the under-listed scenarios. Please make it horizontal (Landscape) presentation, Cartoon styled, colored images but plain background. The illustrations should fit on a standard letter size - (8.5 x 11") and delivered in PDF format. **I want exclusive right/perpetuity to the images.** Also note that these illustrations will be handed out to the participants in a printed form. I just want the illustrations to paint the vivid picture of the theme of the workshop. The delivery date for the submission of the illustrations **is 8 weeks starting from 01-13-2022.** This is the outline of the scenarios to illustrate:

- \* A group (not more than 5) of young and old people in a queue and social distance.
- \* A group (not more than 5) of male and female health workers wearing a mask.
- \* The cemetery with tombstones and a caption that says " Died of Disbelief"
- \* An elderly woman taking the vaccine sitting on a chair.
- \* A sick female patient on a hospital bed in a hospital setting.

My budget for the job **is \$650 per piece.** Let me know if that's fine. If it's not, please get back to me with the price quote and what would be your preferred mode of payment? I'm proposing a certified bank draft, a cashier's check or bank certified check considering the amount involved. I look forward to reading from you soon.

Warm regards.  
Roy Rodgers

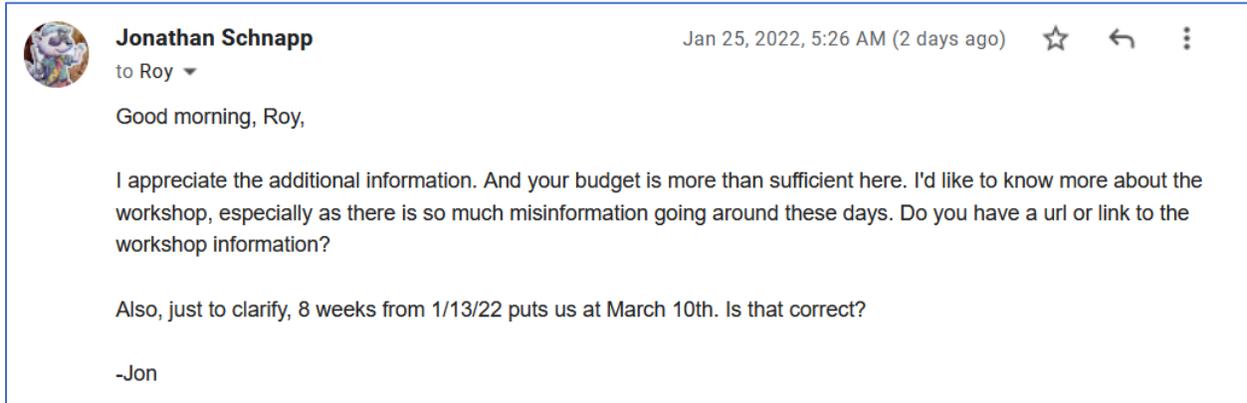
**Annotations:**

- This title is generic. But also... there's no link to any website.
- And, WAIT! Didn't Roy say they are an Apraxia patient?
- This could be fine to include for publishing, media, etc. But struck me as odd for an "academic workshop."
- This list of illustrations is very generic... and also not AT ALL my style as I do mostly animal characters.
- I got this email on Jan 24. Why would anyone list the deadline this way instead just saying they actual date they need it by?
- For the work being requested, this is way way WAY too much to offer.
- Roy has jumped straight to method of payment, not "can you draft up a contract" or "would you like the job?"

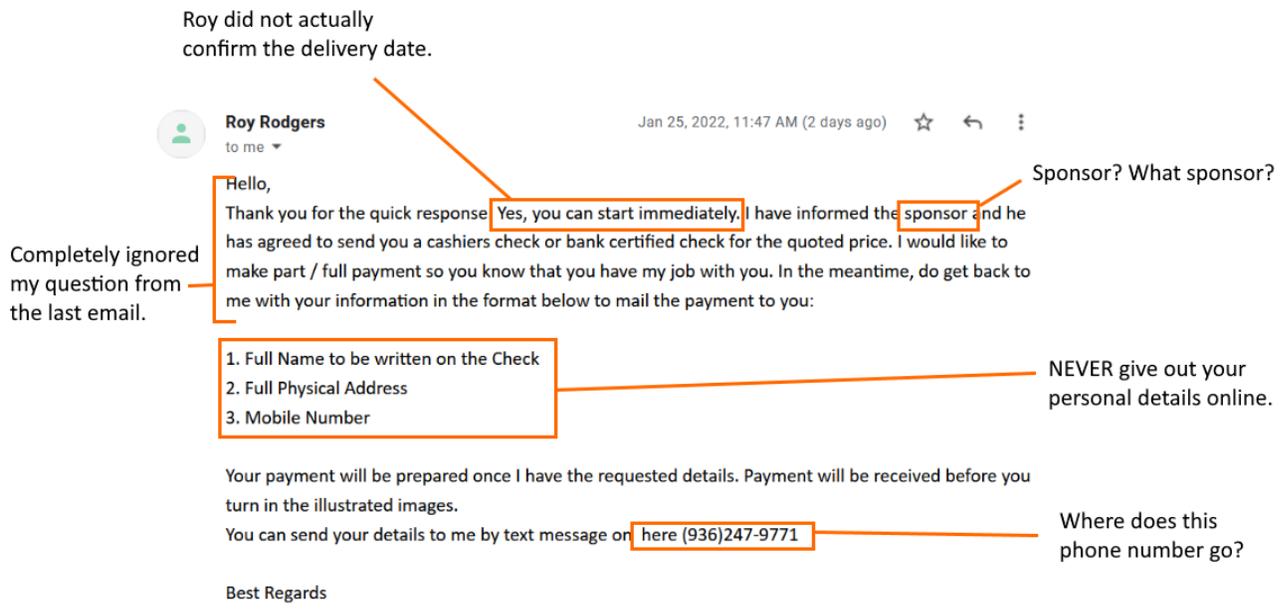
At this point I was certain Roy was not sincere. They certainly answered some of my questions to make it sound legitimate, but others were ignored.

- Why did Roy mention being an Apraxia patient when the workshop is about the pandemic? This could be an attempt to curry sympathy or justify strained communication.
- Why the odd due date? (This could be because the email is likely copied and pasted over and over and they forgot to update the date.)
- Why does Roy need an illustrator for that list of images when surely there must be plenty of stock photographs out there that could be licensed for much cheaper?
- How does some in academia have over \$3000 for *art* for a workshop? (\$3000 is more like the budget for an entire event!)
- Where is this workshop being held? Where could someone register for it?

I decide to give Roy one more chance and reply asking for additional details. Note I don't actually state that I have accepted the job:



If Roy wants my work, there NEEDS to be confirmation that this workshop exists and is real. Roy's response:



Here's my key red flags:

- **"Roy" ultimately didn't communicate like a real person.** Roy didn't answer questions, they didn't include any "chit chat." Me commenting about misinformation regarding the pandemic was an attempt to see if Roy would engage with me. A person who is actually planning such a workshop would be much more likely to respond with something like "Oh, yes. I understand. We're putting this workshop together to try and get 15-17-year-olds to take this more seriously" etc. etc.

- **Roy's offer was too good to be true.** I'm an artist. I've sold original paintings and prints for years. \$650 per piece might be a very reasonable price for art in some cases, but not for the work being requested here. Most people are interested in saving money wherever they can and would more likely ask for the artist to provide an estimate and not volunteer a pay rate. (And what workshop for teenagers can afford \$3000 for just the art?)
- **Roy's Workshop doesn't exist.** Roy did not provide any real information about it and it did not appear on any web searches. Roy's name (Roy Wayne Rogers, from their email) did not return any results. Roy's phone number, using a reverse phone number lookup, only determined that it's a Texas area code.
- **Roy needed my contact information prior to payment.** For reference, Paypal will allow transactions up to *\$4000 without an account*. Sure, Paypal will likely take a cut of that, but there's no reason a bank draft needs to be set up and using an intermediary service will mean the person you're working with can't access your bank account directly. It may seem OK since Roy wasn't asking for account numbers, but if we were to continue the conversation, Roy would certainly ask for them eventually. (Example: "So sorry, it seems we can't issue checks right now. If you just send me your bank info we'll pay you right away!")

## Tips and Takeaways:

---

- **NEVER** give out your personal details to a stranger online.
- If an offer looks too good to be true, it is.
- **Be professional.** Ask questions. It's easy to make up an illustration job in an email. It's harder to back it up with websites, photos, actual details. If the person contacting you is sincere, they will appreciate your professionalism. If they are attempting to scam you, their ruse will have a much, much harder time standing up to your scrutiny. It's a win-win!
- Do some fact checking! Is the person contacting you a real person? If they drop any details, do they match up? A few minutes of Googling can help a lot!
- **NEVER** click on any links that are sent to you. Links can be disguised and just clicking on a link can compromise your data. (Tip: If you hover your mouse over a link, the URL will appear for you to look over, often in the bottom left corner of your web browser.)
- **NEVER** open or download attachments from a stranger online. Even image files!

Hopefully this story will help you be safer online and in your business, whether writing or illustrating and whether you're just getting started or already established. Thanks for reading!