

Technical Clarification:

How Domestika's "Free Trial" Is Processed as a Purchase Object

Purpose of this document

This document explains how Domestika's Plus "free trial" is implemented at a system and checkout level, and why the presence of a "purchase" or "subscription" record does **not necessarily indicate informed user consent to pay**.

The goal is to help payment processors accurately evaluate refund and dispute claims where users report unexpected or unauthorized charges following a free trial. The Plus trial is consistently handled as a purchasable item across entry points, including both "Join for Free" flows and discounted course checkouts.

1. Summary of the Issue

Domestika presents its Plus trial to users as "**free**" or "**\$0**", including through calls-to-action labelled "Join for Free."

However, technical observation of the checkout flow shows that the free trial is:

- Added to the cart as a **discrete line item**
- Processed through the **standard purchase checkout flow**
- Recorded as a **purchase or subscription initiation event**, despite a \$0 total

This creates a disconnect between:

- **User understanding** (no purchase occurred), and
- **System records** (a purchase-like object exists)

This mismatch can lead to later charges being interpreted as authorized subscription continuations, even when users did not believe they consented to pay.

2. Entry Point: "Join for Free" and Purchase Flow Behavior

The global navigation button labelled "**Join for Free**" is implemented as a direct link to a Domestika Plus promotional landing page:

```
<a href="/en/plus_offer_landing">Join for Free</a>
```

This implementation means:

- The button does **not** route to neutral account creation or browsing

- It routes users directly into a **Domestika Plus offer funnel**
- Users are immediately exposed to a **trial-to-paid conversion flow**

Importantly, **the same Plus trial behavior is also observed during discounted course purchases.**

When a user selects a discounted course price:

- The Domestika Plus trial is automatically **added to the cart as a separate line item**
- The Plus trial appears alongside the paid course, even when priced at \$0
- The checkout page uses **purchase language** such as “Confirm your purchase” and “Complete purchase”
- Completion of checkout generates a **purchase or subscription record** for the Plus trial in addition to the course

As a result, whether a user clicks “**Join for Free**” *or* attempts to purchase a discounted course, the Plus trial is treated as a **purchase-style item** within the checkout system.

From a user perspective, a \$0 trial added during a course purchase is reasonably interpreted as a promotional inclusion rather than a separate purchase or subscription agreement. However, at the system level, the trial is recorded in a manner consistent with paid products.

This repeated behavior across multiple entry points indicates that the Plus trial is implemented as a **transactional object**, not a passive or informational trial enrolment.

3. Cart and Checkout Behavior

When the Plus trial is initiated during “join for free” signups or when bundled with courses:

- “Domestika Plus” appears as a **cart item**
- The item:
 - Has a description
 - Has a price (\$0 in the relevant currency)
 - Can be removed using a trash/delete icon
- The checkout page uses:
 - “Confirm your purchase”
 - “Complete purchase”

Despite a \$0 total, the system requires affirmative checkout completion.

This indicates that the trial is handled through the **same purchase infrastructure** as paid products.

4. System Interpretation vs. User Interpretation

System interpretation

From a transactional standpoint, the system likely records:

- A completed checkout event
- Creation of a subscription object
- Association with a user account (and often a payment method)
- A purchase or order record with a \$0 value

To payment processors, this can appear indistinguishable from:

A paid purchase that later renews.

User interpretation

From a consumer standpoint:

- “Free”
- “\$0”
- “Join for Free”
- “No payment today”

are commonly understood to mean:

No purchase has occurred.

Most users do not equate a \$0 checkout with consenting to a future charge, especially when framed as a trial.

5. Why This Matters for Dispute Evaluation

When a later charge occurs, disputes are often denied based on findings such as:

- “The user has an existing subscription”
- “The user previously completed checkout”
- “The charge aligns with subscription terms”

However, those conclusions rely on **system records**, not on whether the user clearly understood they were entering a paid agreement.

Key point for processors:

A purchase record created during a \$0 “free trial” does not, on its own, demonstrate informed consent to future billing.

6. Risk Factors Introduced by This Design

This implementation increases risk of:

- Unintended subscription enrollment
- User confusion about whether a purchase occurred
- Charges perceived as unauthorized
- High dispute and chargeback rates
- Trust erosion between users, merchants, and processors

The risk is not hypothetical — multiple users report charges they did not expect following trials they believed were free and non-transactional.

7. Important Distinction for Processors

Presence of a subscription or purchase record does not equal informed consent to pay

Especially when:

- The initial transaction was \$0
- The flow was labeled “free”
- The user reasonably believed no purchase took place

This distinction is critical when evaluating refunds, reversals, and dispute outcomes.

8. Conclusion

Domestika’s Plus free trial is implemented as a purchase-like event at the system level while being presented as non-purchase activity at the user level.

This structural mismatch can cause payment processors to rely on backend records that do not accurately reflect user intent or understanding.

Careful consideration of this design is warranted when assessing disputes related to unexpected or contested subscription charges.