

International Ethical Principles for Scholarly Publication

1. Aims and Scope

Publication (usually in a peer reviewed learned journal) is an important component of the overall research process, and provides prima facie evidence for the quality and impact of the research work of its authors and, by extension, the institutions that support them and the agencies which funded them. Progress in science depends on publication of research results. It is important to set standards of behaviour for authors, journal editors, peer reviewers, publishers or societies for society-owned or sponsored journals. All involved must act with honesty and fairness, and the processes must be transparent and trustworthy. These guidelines concentrate on the maintenance of ethical standards in publication, recognising that it is an important role of the publisher to support the huge efforts made by journal editors, and the often unsung volunteer work undertaken by peer reviewers, in maintaining the integrity of the scholarly record. The publisher has a supporting, investing and nurturing role in the scholarly communication process but is also ultimately responsible for ensuring that best practice is followed in its publications.

2. General principles

2.1 Conflict of Interest

Examples of potential conflicts of interest include employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, paid expert testimony, patent applications/registrations, and grants or other funding. Potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed to the journal at the earliest possible stage.

All authors should disclose in their manuscript any financial or other relevant interest that might be construed to influence the results or interpretation of their work. All sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed.

Editors should recuse themselves from considering manuscripts (i.e. should ask a co-editor, associate editor or other member of the editorial board to review and consider) in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or (possibly) institutions connected to the papers

Reviewers should not consider manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, funders, or institutions connected to the paper or any relevant interests in organizations that might benefit or suffer from publication of the work.

2.2 Confidentiality

No information shall be disclosed about any submitted manuscript to anyone other than the corresponding author, potential reviewers, actual reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publisher, as appropriate. Manuscripts received for review must be treated as confidential documents. They must not be shown to or discussed with others except as authorised by the editor.

2.3 Privileged Information/Transparency

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in an editor's or reviewer's own research without the express written consent of the author. Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for personal advantage.

3. Principles Specific to Actors

3.1 Authors

3.1.1 Reporting standards and research conduct

Authors of reports of original research should present an accurate account of the work performed as well as an objective discussion of its significance. Underlying data should be represented accurately in the paper. A paper should contain sufficient detail and references to permit others to replicate the work. Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behaviour and are unacceptable.

Review articles and commentaries should also be accurate and objective, and 'opinion pieces' should be clearly identified as such.

If the work involved chemicals, procedures or equipment that have hazards inherent in their use that might not be apparent to other researchers, the author must clearly identify these in the manuscript.

If the work involved the use of animal subjects or human participants, the author should seek assurance that all procedures were performed in compliance with relevant laws and institutional guidelines and that the appropriate institutional committee(s) have approved them. Authors should include a statement in the manuscript that informed consent was obtained for experimentation with human participants. The privacy rights of individuals must always be observed.

3.1.2 Data Access and Retention

Authors may be asked to provide the raw data in connection with a paper for editorial review, and should be prepared to provide public access to such data (See the ALPSP-STM Statement on Data and Databases), if practicable, and should in any event be prepared to retain such data for a reasonable time after publication.

3.1.3 Originality and Plagiarism

Plagiarism takes many forms, from 'passing off' another's paper as the author's own paper, to copying or paraphrasing substantial parts of another's paper (without attribution), to claiming results from research

conducted by others. Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical behaviour and is unacceptable. Authors should submit original works and sources must be appropriately cited or quoted.

3.1.4 Multiple, Redundant or Concurrent Publication

An author should not in general publish manuscripts describing essentially the same findings in more than one journal of primary publication. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently also constitutes unethical behaviour and is unacceptable.

In general, an author should not submit for consideration in another journal a previously published paper. Publication of some kinds of articles (eg, clinical guidelines, translations) in more than one journal is sometimes justifiable, provided certain conditions are met. The authors and editors of the journals concerned must agree to the secondary publication, which must reflect the same data and interpretation as the primary document. The primary reference must be cited in the secondary publication. Further detail on acceptable forms of secondary publication can be found at www.icmje.org.

3.1.5 Acknowledgement of Sources

The work of others must always be properly acknowledged. Authors should cite publications that have influenced the reported work. Information obtained privately, as in conversation, correspondence, or discussion with third parties, must not be used or reported without explicit, written permission from the source. Information obtained in the course of confidential services, such as refereeing manuscripts or grant applications, must not be used without the explicit written permission from the author(s) of the work concerned.

3.1.6 Authorship of the Paper

Authorship should be limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the reported study. All those who have made significant contributions should be listed as co-authors. Where there are others who have participated in substantive aspects of the research project, but who do not qualify as authors, they should be acknowledged or listed as contributors.

The corresponding author should ensure that all appropriate co-authors and no inappropriate co-authors are included on the paper, and that all co-authors have approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

3.1.7 Fundamental errors in published works

When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in his/her own published work, it is the author's obligation to promptly notify the journal editor or publisher and cooperate with the editor to retract or correct the paper.

3.2 Editors

3.2.1 Publication decisions

The Editor of a journal is solely and independently responsible for deciding which of the articles submitted to the journal should be published. The validation of the work in question must always form the basis for such

decisions. The Editor may be guided by the policies of the journal's editorial board and constrained by such legal requirements as shall then be in force regarding libel, copyright infringement and plagiarism. The editor may confer with other editors or reviewers in making this decision.

All editorial decisions shall be made without regard to the race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnic origin, citizenship, or political philosophy of the authors.

The relationship of Editors to Learned Societies who publish their journal is often complex. However, the relationship should be based firmly on the principle of editorial independence.

3.2.2 Vigilance over published record

An editor presented with convincing evidence that the substance or conclusions of a published paper are erroneous should coordinate with the publisher (and/or society) to promote the prompt publication of a correction, retraction, expression of concern, or other note, as may be relevant.

3.2.3 Involvement and cooperation in investigations

An editor should take reasonably responsive measures when ethical complaints have been presented concerning a submitted manuscript or published paper, in conjunction with the publisher (or society). Such measures should be carried out with due process and will generally include contacting the author of the manuscript or paper and giving due consideration of the respective complaint or claims made, but may also include further communications to the relevant institutions, research organisations and funding bodies.

Each editor should ensure that any allegations of research and publication misconduct and their outcomes are documented.

For more examples see the COPE Flow Charts

3.3 Reviewers

3.3.1 Contribution to Editorial Decisions

Peer review assists editors in making editorial decisions and may also assist authors in improving their papers. Peer review is an essential component of formal scholarly communication, and lies at the heart of the scientific method. It is generally agreed that scholars who wish to have their own work published in journals have an obligation to do a fair share of reviewing for these journals.

3.3.2 Promptness

Any selected reviewer who feels unqualified to review the research reported in a manuscript or knows that its prompt review will be impossible should notify the editor and excuse him/herself from the review process.

3.3.3 Standards of Objectivity

Reviews should be honest, objective and free from personal prejudice. Personal criticism of the author is inappropriate. Reviewers should express their views clearly with supporting arguments.

3.3.4 Acknowledgement of Sources

Reviewers should identify relevant published work that has not been cited by the authors. Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument had been previously reported should be accompanied by the relevant citation. A reviewer should also call to the editor's attention any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other published paper of which they have personal knowledge.

3.4 Publishers

3.4.1 Editorial Independence

Publishers should respect the principle of editorial independence outlined in 3.2.1 above.

3.4.2 Published record

A publisher presented with convincing evidence that the substance or conclusions of a published paper are erroneous should coordinate with the editor (and/or the society) to ensure prompt publication of a correction, retraction, expression of concern, or other note, as may be relevant

3.4.3 Third party contracts to publish

Third party contracts to publish between a contract publisher and the owner of the publication should include mention of these guidelines.

4. Further reading:

<http://www.consort-statement.org>

(standards for randomized trials)

<http://www.publicationethics.org.uk>

(COPE—Committee on Publication Ethics)

<http://www.icmje.org>

(Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals)

<http://www.wame.org>

(World Association of Medical Editors)

<http://www.stm-assoc.org>

(The STM trade association--- see the public documents section for “Preservation of the Objective Record of Science -- An STM Guideline”)