

The publication of a paper in a peer-reviewed journal is essential for the development of a sound and respected network of knowledge. It is a direct reflection of the work of the authors and the institutions that support them.

It is therefore important to agree upon standards of ethical behaviour for all parties involved in the act of publishing: the author, the journal editor, the peer reviewer, and the publisher.

Duties of Editors

Publication decisions

The editor of a scientific journal is solely and independently responsible for deciding which of the manuscripts submitted to the journal should be published, often working in conjunction with the other members of the editorial board. The validation of the work in question and its importance to researchers and readers must always underwrite 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 issues such as libel, copyright infringement, and plagiarism. The editor may confer with other editors or reviewers (or society officers) in making these decisions.

The editor should evaluate manuscripts for their intellectual content without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnic origin, citizenship, or political philosophy of the authors.

The editorial policies of the journal should encourage transparency and complete, honest reporting, and the editor should ensure that peer reviewers and authors have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The editor shall use the journal's standard electronic submission system for all journal communications.

The editor must establish, along with the publisher, a transparent mechanism for appeal against editorial decisions.

Peer review

The editor must ensure that the peer review process is fair, unbiased, and timely. Research articles must typically be reviewed by at least two external and independent reviewers, and the editor should seek additional opinions when necessary.

The editor must select reviewers who have suitable expertise in the relevant field and shall follow best practices in avoiding the selection of fraudulent peer reviewers. The editor shall review all disclosures of potential conflicts of interest and suggestions for self-citation made by reviewers in order to determine whether there is any potential for bias.

Confidentiality

The editor must protect the confidentiality of all material submitted to the journal and all communications with reviewers, unless otherwise agreed with the relevant authors and reviewers. In exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the publisher, the editor may share limited information with editors of other journals, when deemed necessary, to investigate suspected research misconduct.

The editor must protect reviewers' identities, unless the reviewers have agreed to disclose their names.

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in an editor'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.

Duties of reviewers

Contribution to editorial decisions

The peer review assists the editor in making editorial decisions and, through the editorial communications with the author, may also assist the author in improving the paper. Peer review is an essential component of formal scholarly communication and lies at the heart of the scientific method. In addition to the specific ethics-related duties described below, reviewers are asked generally to treat authors and their work as they would like to be treated themselves and to observe good reviewing etiquette.

Any selected referee 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 decline to participate in the review process.

Confidentiality

Any manuscripts, received for review, must be treated as confidential documents. Reviewers must not share the review or information about the paper with anyone or contact the authors directly without permission from the editor.

Some editors encourage discussion with colleagues or co-reviewing exercises, but reviewers should first discuss this with the editor in order to ensure that confidentiality is observed and that participants receive suitable credit.

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in a 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.

Alertness to ethical issues

A reviewer should be alert to potential ethical issues in the paper and should bring these to the attention of the editor, including any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other published paper of which the reviewer has personal knowledge. Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument had been previously reported should be accompanied by the relevant citation.

Standards of objectivity and competing interests

Reviews should be conducted objectively. Reviewers should be aware of any personal bias they may have and take this into account when reviewing a paper. Personal criticism of the

author is inappropriate. Referees should express their views clearly, with supporting arguments.

Reviewers should consult the Editor before agreeing to review a paper where they have potential conflicts of interest, resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or institutions connected to the papers.

If a reviewer suggests that an author includes citations to the reviewer's (or their associates') work, this must be for genuine scientific reasons and not with the intention of increasing the reviewer's citation count or enhancing the visibility of their work (or that of their associates).

Duties of authors

Reporting standards

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 and professional publication articles should also be accurate and objective, and editorial 'opinion' works should be clearly identified as such.

Data access and retention

Authors may be asked to provide the research data supporting their paper for editorial review and/or to comply with the open data requirements of the journal. Authors should be prepared to provide public access to such data, if practicable, and should be prepared to retain such data for a reasonable number of years after publication.

Originality and acknowledgement of sources

The authors should ensure that they have written entirely original works. If the authors have used the work and/or words of others, this has to be appropriately cited or quoted, and permission must have been obtained where necessary.

Proper acknowledgement of the work of others must always be given. Authors should cite publications that have influenced the reported work and that give the work appropriate context within the larger scholarly record. 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.

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.

Multiple, redundant, or concurrent publication

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

In general, an author should not submit for consideration in another journal a paper that has been published previously, except in the form of an abstract or as part of a published lecture or academic thesis or as an electronic preprint.

Publication of some kinds of articles (*e.g.*, 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 of the primary document. The primary reference must be cited in the secondary publication.

Confidentiality

Information obtained in the course of confidential services, such as refereeing manuscripts or grant applications, must not be used without the explicit written permission of the author of the work involved in these services.

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 substantial contributions should be listed as co-authors.

If there are others who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the paper (*e.g.*, language editing), they should be recognised in the acknowledgements section.

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 seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

Authors are expected to consider carefully the list and order of authors before submitting their manuscript and to provide the definitive list of authors at the time of the original submission. Only in exceptional circumstances the Editor will consider (at their discretion) the addition, deletion, or rearrangement of authors after the manuscript has been submitted, and the author must clearly flag any such request to the Editor. All authors must agree with any such addition, removal, or rearrangement.

Authors take collective responsibility for the work. Each individual author is responsible for ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Declaration of competing interests

All authors should disclose in their manuscript any financial and personal relationships with other people or organisations that could be viewed as inappropriately influencing (bias) their work.

All sources of financial support for the conduct of the research and/or preparation of the article should be disclosed, as should the role of the sponsor(s), if any, in study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the article for publication. If the funding source(s) had no such involvement, then this should be stated.

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

Notification of fundamental errors

When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in their 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 if deemed necessary by the editor. If the editor or the publisher learns from a third party that a published work contains an error, it is the obligation of the author to cooperate with the editor, including providing evidence to the editor where requested.

Image integrity

It is not acceptable to enhance, obscure, move, remove, or introduce a specific feature within an image. Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or colour balance are acceptable if and as long as they do not obscure or eliminate any information present in the original. Manipulating images for improved clarity is accepted, but manipulation for other purposes could be seen as scientific ethical abuse and will be dealt with accordingly.

Authors should comply with any specific policy for graphical images applied by the relevant journal, *e.g.*, providing the original images as supplementary material with the article or depositing these in a suitable repository.