

## 1. General procedures (all types of complaints)

Gather information: who is making the complaint or raising the issue and who should then become involved?

- External Editor and internal publishing editor should always coordinate
- If complaints come into Elsevier through any source other than the publishing editor, the publishing editor should be contacted immediately

Ultimately, who is the decision-maker regarding how to resolve and handle the complaint?

- External journal Editor (or society-owner for society journal)
  - as to the merits of the claim (plagiarism, scientific procedures, context of dispute, prior reported research, background of parties)
  - possibly in conjunction with other co-Editors, members of editorial board or society, peer reviewers, experts in the field selected by Editor
  - possibly in conjunction with the “other journal” Editor or publisher (especially for multiple publication issues)
- Elsevier may need to be involved to help document the dispute and its resolution and to provide specialist support from time to time
  - Use the procedures outlined in this document
  - Professional judgment of publishing editor or publishing director about what ‘best practices’ are with respect to the complaint made and its resolution
  - Professional advice of one kind or another (obtain external expert? legal adviser?)

When is an ethics complaint a “legal” matter that requires Elsevier legal review/support?

- The “obvious” times:
  - Formal legal complaint or brief filed in court
  - Letter from attorney representing an “aggrieved” party
  - A complaint is made about the infringement of a legal right such as copyright, moral rights, or a right of privacy
- The less obvious times:
  - Plausible (from a scientific perspective) conflicting claims from several parties which cannot be resolved by the Editor through the methods and procedures outlined herein
    - (suggesting that significant factual investigation will be required)
  - Where comment is made in a notice, expression of concern, corrigendum, or retraction that might be considered defamatory (this is automatically reviewed in the case of retractions)

Documenting the complaint/dispute

- The publishing editor should always help the Editor to record and document claim
  - Prepare ‘incident report’ with all factual questions (who, what, when, where, why) dealt with
  - For plagiarism and duplicate publication issues, obtain the respective texts/articles
- Useful to log incident reports and periodically report on such incidents

### Due process for our authors

- When the complaint is made against our author, general rule will be that the journal Editor should contact the author about whom a complaint has been made, and the author given opportunity to respond/comment
  - Editor may decide on basis of author response (if author is responsive, articulates clear and convincing position—and the Editor may draw inferences from the opposite as well)

Consider whether there are other bodies or agents that could or should be involved (if after some degree of investigation, there seems to be some merit in complaint and the complaint seems one that would be more easily (and reasonably) investigated and solved by that other institution)

- For plagiarism and duplicate publication, the other publisher or journal involved in publishing the other text
- For authorship and fraud claims, the institutions where the research was conducted
- For bias or unfair/inappropriate competitive acts, institutions that employ the alleged wrong-doer
- For conflicts of interest disclosure matters and violation of research standards, funding agency or employing institutions
- COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) does take on some matters, often more ‘high-profile’ cases, when other avenues are documented as failed—note that Elsevier is not a member although some individual journals are (see <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/submit>)
- Note that we will not necessarily be bound by a finding of an institution or agency if such finding is not deemed reasonable by the Editor (or does not appear to us to be reasonable)

### Responsibility to our authors

- Although these procedures generally assume that it is our publication and author or co-authors who are complained about, it is possible that our authors will raise a complaint with us about another publication or author
  - Usually this should be a contact made by the journal Editor to the editor of the other journal directly
  - Procedures to be followed generally mirror the procedures outlined herein

### Remedies

- In many cases, the communication of the complaint to the author and/or the authors’ institution will in and of itself be considered a significant sanction
- Other remedies (these are not exclusive) may include (in order of severity):
  - Publication of a notice, corrigendum or erratum in a future issue (which could also take the form of an ‘expression of concern’)
  - Formal retraction of the article (watermarking the article to indicate it has been retracted and publication of a notice as to the reason—see Elsevier retraction policy at <http://info.sciencedirect.com/licensing/policies/withdrawal/>)
  - Formal removal of the article (the actual deletion from the electronic record, a remedy suggested only for material that invades a subject’s privacy or could cause serious harm)
  - Publication of an editorial concerning the ethical issues raised and the journal’s decision concerning the issues
  - Refusal on the part of the journal Editor to consider future submissions for a specified time from the author or research group (as a purely

internal editorial decision by the Editor-in-chief and on a confidential basis by that Editor)

- Note such a decision is considered the most severe sanction and should not be taken lightly
- Best practice is that such a decision be kept confidential (not published)
- Elsevier publishing staff will likely be involved to help facilitate

## 2. Authorship complaints

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the corresponding author or author about whom a complaint has been made (as a matter of “due process”) and possibly the institution or company at which the research took place (the complainant may not wish to make the complaint at such a formal level)

Our preference is for authors to resolve such matters amongst themselves, although that is not always possible

In that communication (see form letter A), the Editor should indicate that matter may be referred to institution or company where research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor) (NOTE: some agencies such as the NIH’s Office of Research Integrity, will not consider disputes that are solely about authorship)

If corresponding (or complained-about) author accepts the position of the complainant, then publication of a correction, corrigendum or retraction procedures are the normal remedies (note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate classification of the complainant’s contribution to the paper or how the complainant is identified)

If corresponding (or complained-about) author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author’s explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author’s explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the Editor’s correspondence, then the Editor may want to refer the matter to institution or company at which the research took place (see form letter C)

If institution or company responds and indicate they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the corresponding author and complainant that the journal will seriously consider the decision of the institutional review—note however that the Editor may still determine that the result of the institutional review is insufficient or inaccurate

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If funding agency involved (to determine this, review disclosure statements or acknowledgments in the article), the Editor may wish to consider contacting agency (using form letter E)

If the authors, employing institutions and funding agencies fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable time or manner, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts and to make a recommendation to the publisher (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through a corrigendum or retraction

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

### 3. Plagiarism complaints

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless at some point the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process)

First stage must be a simple comparison of the relevant (two) texts—a simple side-by-side comparison by the Editor for the simpler forms of plagiarism—a more thoughtful analysis by the Editor if paraphrasing or types of ‘self-plagiarism’ are alleged (see Legal Guidelines for Editors Concerning Ethics Issues)

If the Editor reasonably determines that there is significant overlap of text, then the Editor should correspond with the corresponding (or complained-about) author—in some cases for confidentiality purposes it may be best for the Editor to summarise (rather than simply forward) the complaint

It may be useful for the Editor to involve other peer reviewers, editorial board members, or experts in the relevant field (anonymously as to the complainant and if possible as to the identity of the complained-about authors), using standard peer review procedures, to review the texts (especially if the allegation is a more complex form of plagiarism)

Legal review may be appropriate if the complainant or their publisher is alleging copyright infringement (Elsevier legal will provide this)

In the communication to the corresponding/complained-about author (see form letter A), the Editor should indicate that it is possible that the matter may be referred to institution or company where research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor)

Note that the Editor may believe that referral to the institution or agency is not necessary (unlike with respect to claims about authorship or fraud, where the institution has responsibility for the conduct at their institution and an obligation to investigate, plagiarism may simply be a mistake—perhaps a type of unattributed copying-- or may be considered to be the personal responsibility of the author rather than an institutional responsibility)

If corresponding/complained-about author accepts the position of the complainant, then a corrigendum or retraction would be the normal remedy (note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate description)

- it is normally sufficient to simply indicate that the complained-about work included substantial parts copied without attribution from a prior work—
- although the complainant may feel a stronger statement would be more appropriate--- and if in fact the wrong-doer simply ‘passed off’ someone else’s paper as their own, a stronger statement would most likely be appropriate, but with legal review for defamation
- ultimately the Editor may need to make a judgment as to the appropriate language for the statement, if there is no consensus, and should do so in consultation with Elsevier staff

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author’s explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author’s explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded in timely fashion to the Editor's correspondence, then it would be fair for the Editor to draw an inference that there is some substance to the complaint

If the Editor has decided to involve the employing institution or company, and if that institution responds and indicate they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor must inform the corresponding (or complained-about) author and complainant that the journal will seriously consider the decision of the institutional review—note however that the Editor may still determine that the result of the institutional review is insufficient or inaccurate

As with authorship or fraud complaints, if an institution is contacted and responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If funding agency involved (to determine this, review disclosure statements or acknowledgments in the article), the Editor may wish to consider contacting agency (using form letter E)

If the complainant and authors, or if relevant the employing institutions and funding agencies, fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in the reasonable judgment of the Editor, as to the underlying facts, and to make a recommendation to the publisher (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through a corrigendum or the retraction process

#### 4. Multiple publication (duplicate publication, multiple or concurrent publication, simultaneous submission)

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless at some point the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process) and likely the other journal

First stage must be a simple comparison of the relevant texts—a simple side-by-side comparison by the Editor for the simpler forms of duplicate publication—a more thoughtful analysis by the Editor if the same research or a single research project is being inappropriately written up as separate articles (see Legal Guidelines)

Note that an identical or similar version of an article may have been published by one journal (often in a national or local edition, usually in a local language) and legitimately republished in another more international journal. The ethical implications of such republication will depend on the editorial policies of the journal—and agreement by the editors of the two journals involved. Republication may be appropriate provided the prior publication and any relevant facts concerning such publication are disclosed to and agreed by the Editor. A brief explanation of these circumstances and full citation details for the previous article should be published along with the newly published version, preferably as a footnote to the title.

If the Editor reasonably determines that the articles are the same or the research reported is substantially the same (or should not have been reported in multiple articles), then the Editor should communicate accordingly with the corresponding (or complained-about) author and likely the other journal

Either the Editor or possibly the publishing staff may contact the other journal where the duplicate publication occurred, the Editor more likely to contact the other editor (see form letter D for this purpose), the publishing staff more likely to contact the publisher

It may be useful for the Editor to involve other peer reviewers, editorial board members, or experts in the relevant field, using standard peer review procedures, to review the texts (especially if the allegation is a more complex form of multiple publication)

In the communication to the corresponding (or complained-about) author (see form letter A), Editor may indicate that it is possible that the matter may be referred to institution or company where research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by the Editor)

If corresponding (complained-about) author accepts the position of the complainant, then a corrigendum or the retraction procedure are the normal remedies (note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate description of the reason—

- it is normally sufficient to simply indicate that the complained-about version was in essence previously published in the other journal

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded in timely fashion to the Editor's correspondence, then it would be fair for the Editor to draw an inference that there is some substance to the complaint

If the complainant and authors, or if relevant the employing institutions and funding agencies, fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts, and to make a recommendation to Elsevier (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through some form of notice, corrigendum, or the retraction and removal process

## 5. Research results misappropriation ('passing off' someone else's research work as author's own work)

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process) and possibly the institution or company at which the research took place

Note the procedures below are similar to those for authorship complaints, although in essence this type of complaint is essentially a complaint of plagiarism

In the communication to the corresponding/complained-about author (see form letter A), Editor should indicate that matter may be referred to institution or company where research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor)

If corresponding/complained-about author accepts the position of the complainant, then a notice, corrigendum or retraction process may be the appropriate remedies (note that there may still be disagreement concerning how to credit the prior original work or the appropriate description of the wrong-doing)

- it may be appropriate for such note to simply indicate that the work reported in the article actually represented work done by the other author as reported in the complained-about article
- a more critical statement may be requested by the complainant or the institution which the Editor should reasonably consider (with legal review for defamation)
- ultimately the Editor may need to make a judgment as to the appropriate language for the statement, if there is no consensus, and should do so in consultation with Elsevier staff

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the Editor's correspondence, then the Editor should refer matter to institution or company employing the co-authors noting the allegation that the research results are not original (see form letter C)

If institution or company responds and indicate either that they agree the research was not original to the purported authors/co-authors or that they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the corresponding author and complainant that the institution has taken on such review and that the journal will seriously consider such determination

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If funding agency involved (to determine this, review disclosure statements or acknowledgments in the article), the Editor may wish to consider contacting agency (using form letter E)

If the authors, employing institutions and funding agencies fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts and to make a recommendation to the

publisher (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through the retraction and removal process

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

## 6. Allegations of research errors and fraud

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process) and the institution or company at which the research took place (especially if fraud is alleged)

Note the procedures below are similar to those for research results misappropriation

In the communication to the corresponding author (see form letter A), the Editor should indicate that matter will likely be referred to institution or company where research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor)

If corresponding (complained-about) author accepts the position of the complainant, then a note, corrigendum or retraction process may be appropriate remedies (note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate description of the error or wrong-doing)

- it may be appropriate for such note to simply indicate that the research work reported in the article contained errors (if only some parts of the research was invalid) and if the Editor concludes the mistake was unintentional
- if the errors are more critical or fraud more pervasive a more critical statement may be appropriate (with legal review for defamation)
- ultimately the Editor may need to make a judgment as to the appropriate language for the statement, if there is no consensus, and should do so in consultation with Elsevier staff

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the Editor's correspondence, then the Editor should refer matter to institution or company employing the author/co-authors noting the allegation of fraud (see form letter C)

If institution or company responds and indicate either that they agree there was research fraud or that they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the corresponding author and complainant that the Editor will seriously consider the judgment of the institution (through corrigendum or our retraction and removal procedures)

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If funding agency involved (to determine this, review disclosure statements or acknowledgments in the article), the Editor should consider contacting agency (using form letter F)

If the authors and complainant, employing institutions and funding agencies fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable manner and time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts and to make a recommendation to Elsevier (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through the retraction and removal process

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

## 7. Research standards violations

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process) and possibly the institution or company at which the research took place

Note the procedures below are similar to those for research fraud

In the communication to the corresponding author (see form letter A), Editor should indicate that matter is likely to be referred to institution or company where research took place, the standard-setting body (if relevant), the institution or company which provided undisclosed financial support (if relevant), or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by the Editor)

If corresponding/complained-about author accepts the position of the complainant, then note, corrigendum or journal retraction procedures are appropriate remedies (there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate description of the wrong-doing) unless the privacy rights of an individual have been violated (one of the few instances where removal may be appropriate)

- it may be appropriate to simply say that the research work reported in the article violated certain standards (such as treatment of research subjects) accepted in the field (if the results would not be affected)
- if the violations errors are more critical, or if privacy rights have been seriously infringed and remedial consent cannot be obtained (in the judgment of the Editor), then a more critical statement may be appropriate (with legal review for defamation)
- ultimately the Editor may need to make a judgment as to the appropriate language for the statement, if there is no consensus, and should do so in consultation with Elsevier staff

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the Editor's communication, then the Editor may refer matter to institution or company employing the author/co-authors noting the allegation of misconduct, and possibly if relevant the standard-setting body or funding entity (see form letter C)

If institution, company or agency responds and indicate either that they agree there was misconduct or that they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the corresponding/complained-about author and complainant that the Editor will seriously consider the determination of the institution (through a corrigendum or our retraction and removal procedures)

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If the authors and complainant, employing institutions, standard-setting body or funding agencies fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable manner and time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts, and to make a recommendation to the publisher (and possibly the society for society

journals), which we will implement normally through a corrigendum or the retraction and removal process

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

## 8. Undisclosed conflicts of interest

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the corresponding (or complained-about) author (due process) and possibly the institution or company at which the research took place

Note the procedures below are similar to those for research standards violations

In the communication to the corresponding/complained-about author (see form letter A), Editor should indicate that matter is likely to be referred to institution or company where research took place, the standard-setting body (if relevant), the institution or company which provided undisclosed financial support (if relevant), or any other relevant institution or agency (for example a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor)

If corresponding/complained-about author accepts the position of the complainant, then note, corrigendum or journal retraction procedures are appropriate remedies (note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate description of the wrong-doing)

- it may be appropriate for the note to simply indicate that a potential conflict of interest should have been disclosed
- if the disclosure is significant enough to potentially change the conclusions (in the judgment of the Editor), then a more critical statement may be appropriate (with legal review for defamation)
- ultimately the Editor may need to make a judgment as to the appropriate language for the statement, if there is no consensus, and should do so in consultation with Elsevier staff

If corresponding/complained-about author rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment (see form letter B)

If the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the Editor's communication, then the Editor should refer matter to institution or company employing the author/co-authors noting the allegation of misconduct, and possibly if relevant the standard-setting body or funding entity (see form letter C)

If institution, company or agency responds and indicate either that they agree there was misconduct or that they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the corresponding/complained-about author and complainant that the Editor will seriously consider the finding of the institution (through a corrigendum or our retraction and removal procedures)

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If the authors and complainant, employing institutions, standard-setting body or funding agencies fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable manner and time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts, and to make a recommendation to the publisher (and possibly the society for society journals), which we will implement normally through a corrigendum or the retraction and removal process

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

## 9. Reviewer bias or competitively harmful acts by reviewers

Complainant must be made aware that matter cannot be investigated unless the journal Editor informs the reviewer (due process obligation to reviewer, similar to that owed to authors) and possibly the institution or company at which the reviewer is employed

Note the procedures below are similar to those for research misappropriation by one author of another author's work

In the communication to the reviewer (see form letter F), the Editor should indicate that matter may be referred to reviewer's institution or company if the reviewer does not or is unable to provide a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by Editor)

If reviewer accepts the position of the complainant, and if an inappropriate publication or public claim has been made by the reviewer that the Editor believes should be retracted, then the Editor will work with the relevant publishing editor to effect such retraction or removal, and ensure that the actual researcher receives appropriate credit (this could take many forms depending on the circumstances)

- the Editor will most likely remove the reviewer from the journal database (a form of asking for the reviewer's resignation) and may consider in extreme cases whether any form of public statement to that effect would be appropriate (with legal review for defamation and reviewer confidentiality issues)

If reviewer rejects the position of the complainant, then the Editor will have to consider whether the reviewer's explanation is reasonable—normally the Editor would also inform the complainant of the reviewer's explanation and seek comment (see form letter G)

If the reviewer has not responded to the Editor's communication, then the Editor may refer matter to institution or company employing the reviewer noting the allegation of misconduct, and possibly other relevant institutions or bodies (see form letter H)

If employing institution or company responds and indicates either that they agree there was misconduct or that they will investigate and mediate the result, then the Editor should inform the reviewer and complainant that the journal will be bound by such determination of the institution

If institution responds negatively or does not respond, this should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution)

If the reviewer and complainant or employing institution all fail to reach consensus or to act in a reasonable manner and time, then the Editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts, and to make a recommendation to the publisher (and possibly the society for society journals)

It may be advisable for the Editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant

Form Letter A  
Communication to author

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

Dear [author]

Concern has been raised about the publication of the article listed above, for which you are the corresponding author. As the editor of the journal, I must take seriously any allegation raised that if true would violate the journal's policies (set out in our ethical statements, instructions to the author, and the like).

[The substance of the complaint is that {description}, which if true, would violate our publishing policies.]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the communication which raises the concern noted.]

Please provide me a prompt and full response within 30 days, which I will also [discuss/share] with the party raising this concern.

Depending on the nature of your response, I should also inform you that I [may OR also] consider it necessary to inform and involve the research institution at which the underlying research took place [or is alleged to have taken place], and [possibly] the funding agency that supported the research [or that allegedly supported the research].

Please note that if we do not have an adequate and timely response, we may be forced to conclude that the allegations are truthful.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]

[Editor-in-chief]

Form Letter B  
Communication to complainant

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

Dear [complainant]

As we have already discussed, I have contacted the author of the article in question with regard to the allegation raised by you in your initial communication of [date] (please see copy attached). I have now had a response from the author.

[The substance of the response is {description},]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the response from the author which addresses the allegations made.]

Although ultimately it will be my responsibility to make a reasonable determination as to the allegations made and possible responses or remedies, I would be very interested in your views and reactions.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]

[Editor-in-chief]

Form Letter C  
Communication to the institution

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

[Institutional address  
Name or title of executive]

Dear [executive]

Concern has been raised about the research reported in the article listed above, research that was [allegedly?] conducted at your institution. As the Editor of the journal, I must take seriously any allegation raised that if true would violate the journal's policies (which are set out in our ethical statements, Instructions to Authors and the like).

[The substance of the complaint is that {description}, which if true, would violate our publishing policies.]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the communication which raises the concern noted.]

I have separately written to the author in question who is in residence [employed by?] at your institution and have asked for a response within 30 days to the allegations.

[To date no such response has been forthcoming.]

OR

[I have received a response from the author [the substance of which is \_\_\_\_\_/ OR a copy of which is enclosed].

In my view, this [lack of response does not demonstrate a responsible attitude towards scholarship] OR [response is lacking in detail and clarity and suggests a somewhat irresponsible attitude towards scholarship] which I believe merits your consideration and review.

Because your institution has the most knowledge about the research in question, and has responsibility for the research, I am asking you to initiate the appropriate investigation and to keep me informed about your progress. The journal may revise the publication record, based on the results of your investigation and my editorial judgment.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]  
[Editor-in-chief]

Copy: [author]

[NOTE: IF NO RESPONSE IS RECEIVED, WOULD BE USEFUL TO SEND A REMINDER WITH THIS MESSAGE: I have not had a reply to my communication of [date]. Please note that if we do not have an adequate and timely response {,within 30 days,} we may be forced to conclude that the allegations outlined in that communication are truthful.]

Form Letter D  
Communication to the other journal (double publication)

[letterhead of the journal editorial office, Editor's general contact information or the Elsevier publishing staff]

Dear [Editor/Publishing staff member]

I am the Editor [publishing editor] of the journal [title] [published by Elsevier]. We have been advised [by one of our authors/readers] that apparently a paper published in our journal was [subsequently/previously] published in an almost identical form in your journal [title].

The version as published in our journal was:

[insert title, authors, other publication information]

Abstract

[abstract]

The version as published in your journal was

[insert title, authors, other publication information]

Abstract

[abstract]

[Although I do not have access to the full-text version of your article,] the similarities [in the abstracts] are striking, and the person who advised us of this situation says the full papers are almost identical. [You will see by the accepted dates that our version precedes yours by (amount of time).]

We have written to the corresponding author identified for the paper as published in our journal and asked the author to respond shortly, and we will keep you informed of any response we receive.

If we collectively decide that this is a case of duplicate publication, we will need to determine which version of the paper should remain public and noted as the "version of record" and which paper should be retracted, in accordance with policies and procedures governing academic publication. [As noted, our paper was published first and our proposal would be that it remain the "version of record" with the version published in your journal retracted.]

We hope you are in agreement with this course of action and please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards,

Editor [Publishing editor]

Form Letter E  
Communication to the funding agency

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

[Agency address  
Name or title of agency officer]

Dear [officer]

Concern has been raised about the research reported in the article listed above, for which your agency provided (at least partial) funding.. [IF APPROPRIATE ADD: Your agency also has promulgated its own ethical guidelines which may also be implicated.]

[The substance of the complaint is that {description}, which if true, would violate our publishing policies. {and your own guidelines}]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the communication which raises the concern noted.]

I have separately written to the author in question and the institution at which the author is resident and have asked for a timely and substantive response to the allegations.

[To date no such response has been forthcoming.]

OR

[I have received a response from the author and/or institution [the substance of which is \_\_\_\_\_/ OR a copy of which is enclosed].

As your agency has had significant involvement with the underlying research, I believe it would be appropriate if your agency would initiate the appropriate investigation, and to keep me informed of your progress. The journal may revise the publication record, based on the results of your investigation and my editorial judgment.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]  
[Editor-in-chief]

Copy: [author] [institution]

Form Letter F  
Communication to reviewer

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

Dear [reviewer]

Concern has been raised about the confidentiality of the review process for the article listed above, for which you served as a reviewer. As I am sure you are aware, ensuring the confidentiality of the submission and review process is critical to the scholarly publishing mission.

[The substance of the complaint is that {description}, which if true, would violate our ethical policies.]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the communication which raises the concern noted.]

I [may OR also] consider it necessary to inform your employing institution for further review of the matter.

Please provide me a with a full and prompt response within 30 days. I will also [discuss/share] your response with the party raising this concern.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]

[Editor-in-chief]

Form Letter G  
Communication to complainant (re reviewer)

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

Dear [complainant]

As we have already discussed, I have communicated to the reviewer in question concerning the allegation raised by you in your initial communication of [date] (please see copy attached). I have now had a response from the reviewer which I wanted to share with you for your comment.

[The substance of the response is {description},]

Although ultimately it is my responsibility to make a reasonable determination as to the allegations made and possible responses or remedies, I would very much appreciate your views and reactions.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]  
[Editor-in-chief]

Form Letter H  
Communication to the reviewer's institution

[letterhead of the journal editorial office or the Editor's general contact information]  
[date]

[title of article, date of publication]

[Institutional address  
Name or title of executive]

Dear [executive]

Concern has been raised about the publication of the article listed above, in connection with which a reviewer employed at your institution, [Reviewer name], provided peer referee services. As I am sure you are aware, the [scientific/medical] community depends on the objective review and principled behavior of reviewers.

[The substance of the complaint is that {description}, which if true, would violate our publishing policies.]

OR

[Attached you will find a copy of the communication which raises the concern noted.]

I have separately written to [Reviewer name] and have asked for a timely and substantive response to the allegations.

[To date no such response has been forthcoming.]

OR

[I have received a response from the author [the substance of which is \_\_\_\_\_/ OR a copy of which is enclosed].

As the allegations are matters of which your institution will have significant concerns, I am asking your institution to initiate the appropriate investigation and to keep me informed about your progress.

Very truly yours,

[Editor name]  
[Editor-in-chief]

Copy: [reviewer]