



## **Ethical Guidelines for Journal Publication** **Version 1.0, October 2006**

### **Introduction**

The formal component of the scholarly communication system, that is to say the publication of an article in a peer reviewed learned journal, serves many purposes outside of simple communication. It is a building block in the development of a coherent and respected network of knowledge. It is prima facie evidence for the quality and impact of the research work of its authors and by extension the institutions that support them. It supports, and is itself an example, of the scientific method. For all these reasons and more it is important to lay down standards of expected ethical behaviour by all parties involved in the act of publishing: the author, the journal editor, the peer reviewer, the publisher and the society for society-owned or sponsored journals.

These guidelines have been written with all these requirements in mind but especially 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. Although ethical codes inevitably concentrate on the infractions that sometimes occur, it is a tribute to scholarly practice that the system works so well and that problems are comparatively rare. 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.

These guidelines are designed specifically for primary research journals, but may also be relevant for review and professional publications as well. Individual journals will often have more elaborate or more distinct ethical procedures, generally reflected in their instructions document, and many journals also accept and are in many cases founding participants with respect to discipline-specific standards or standard-setting bodies such as ICMJE, CONSORT, and the like (see references below).

Elsevier, as the world's leading journal publisher, takes its duties of guardianship over the scholarly record extremely seriously. Our journal programmes record "the minutes of science" and we recognise our responsibilities as the keeper of those "minutes" in all our policies, not least the ethical guidelines that we have here adopted.

Elsevier is adopting these policies and procedures that support editors, reviewers and authors in performing their ethical duties under these guidelines. We are committed to ensuring that the potential for advertising, reprint or other commercial revenue has no impact or influence on editorial decisions. We will provide help in communications with other journals and/or publishers where this is useful to editors, and we are working with other publishers and industry associations to set standards for best practices on ethical matters, errors and retractions. Finally, Elsevier is prepared to provide specialised legal review and counsel if necessary.



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### **Duties of Editors**

#### Publication decisions

The Editor of a learned journal is solely and independently responsible for deciding which of the articles submitted to the journal should be published, often working in conjunction with the relevant society (for society-owned or sponsored journals). 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 libel, copyright infringement and plagiarism. The editor may confer with other editors or reviewers (or society officers) in making this decision.

#### Fair play

An 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.

#### Confidentiality

The editor and any editorial staff must not disclose any information about a submitted manuscript to anyone other than the corresponding author, reviewers, potential reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publisher, as appropriate.

#### Disclosure and Conflicts of interest

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.

Editors should recuse themselves (i.e. should ask a co-editor, associate editor or other member of the editorial board instead to review and consider) from considering manuscripts 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.

#### 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.



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### 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 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 and research bodies.

### **Duties of Reviewers**

#### Contribution to Editorial Decisions

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. Elsevier shares the view of many that all scholars who wish to contribute to publications have an obligation to do a fair share of reviewing.

#### Promptness

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 excuse himself from the review process.

#### Confidentiality

Any 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.

#### Standards of Objectivity

Reviews should be conducted objectively. Personal criticism of the author is inappropriate. Referees should express their views clearly with supporting arguments.

#### 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.



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### Disclosure and Conflict of Interest

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.

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, companies, or institutions connected to the papers.

### **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 raw data in connection with a paper for editorial review, and should be prepared to provide public access to such data (consistent with 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.

#### Originality and Plagiarism

The authors should ensure that they have written entirely original works, and if the authors have used the work and/or words of others, this has been appropriately cited or quoted.

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



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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 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 of 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](http://www.icmje.org).

### Acknowledgement of Sources

Proper acknowledgment of the work of others must always be given. Authors should cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of 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 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 significant contributions should be listed as co-authors. Where there are others who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project, 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 seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

### Hazards and Human or Animal Subjects

If the work involves chemicals, procedures or equipment that have any unusual hazards inherent in their use, the author must clearly identify these in the manuscript.



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If the work involves the use of animal or human subjects, the author should ensure that the manuscript contains a statement 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 subjects. The privacy rights of human subjects must always be observed.

### Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest

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

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

### 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. If the editor or the publisher learn from a third party that a published work contains a significant error, it is the obligation of the author to promptly retract or correct the paper or provide evidence to the editor of the correctness of the original paper.

### 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")