

# Scopus

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: The Role of an Editor

### Introduction

The Scopus team conduct journal editors' workshop together with the Subject Chairs from our Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB) in many regions of the world. For more information about Scopus and the CSAB, its scope and function, please click [here](#).

Through the many interactions and discussions with journal editors, we thought it would be helpful if we prepared a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) to reach out to as many journal editors as possible so that they can have an up to date reference list of similar questions and answers that their peers are facing. The FAQs cover a wide range of questions that have arisen during workshop discussions and individual contact queries. We consider them to be helpful for new editors, as well as the more experienced ones who wish for the latest editor updates, as well as guidance on publication ethics.

This guidance has been revised especially for those editors and their editorial teams who are preparing their journal for possible submission and indexing in Scopus.

For the purpose of this paper we will use the term "***Editor***" for the person who is identified as the leader of the journal - as per the journal information page on the website. For some journals, other titles such as ***Editor in Chief*** may be used.

We recognize that there are new models of publishing journals emerging, with varied editorial structures. Overall however, they adhere to basic principles in terms of leadership and management of a journal and which need to be made clear via their journal web-site. This is especially important in relation to decision making policies regarding an article submitted.

We also recognize that a journal may be one of many published by one Publisher, where there is one major central group of policies developed for them all. It is expected that clear links are made on the individual journal web site to such policies but that the aims and scope and other information should be very clearly journal specific.

The main Editor of a journal who offers management and leadership in its ongoing development is a key role. If you are preparing to develop the journal for submission to Scopus, it would be important to ensure

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that a clear profile of this leader is seen on the journal website. This also applies to the whole team of editors if they are part of the main decision making process.

*Please use the FAQs below as a guide and reference only.*

We have tried to make the FAQ's as concise as possible but they are by no means definitive questions and answers, as roles and responsibilities differ from journal to journal, along with their publishers specific role requirements. We welcome feedback on the FAQs and if you think additional questions would benefit the Editor community, please send them to [titlesuggestion@scopus.com](mailto:titlesuggestion@scopus.com) with the subject header 'FAQs'.

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## **1. How do you become an Editor?**

If you have aspirations to become an editor, one of the ways is through a direct invitation from a publisher. This may happen as a result of your expertise in a specific field of science or discipline, in particular when Publishers wish to publish a new journal. It could also be that you had approached them with the idea of setting up a new journal with their Publishing Company. It is important of course that if you have done this that you are familiar with their overall aims and scope and of course how your specific idea for a journal fits in with their overall portfolio.

It has to be noted that some of you will be approached by publishers not only to become an editor for them but also to write papers or review.

It is your responsibility to check the source of the invitation or request. (See Think Check Submit for example: <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/> which is a site that “*helps researchers identify trusted journals and publishers for their research*”. Another option could be to check whether the journal or publisher is a recognized member of COPE or other similar organization: see COPE web site: <https://publicationethics.org/members>)

For established journals, you may be invited by the existing team of editors to join them as part of the editorial team. This can happen through inter-personal communication at various scholarly events, such as conferences in your field or through a direct invitation, by someone in a key leadership role that you know from a journal, to submit a CV and expression of interest in an editorial role. Being a journal editor is viewed as a position of esteem in scholarly publishing and as evidence of a developing academic profile .

Another way to become an editor is to set up your own journal with a University Publisher where you are employed. Setting up a new journal however has a financial cost, regardless of its proposed mode of dissemination, for example only on-line publication or combined with a ‘ paper based ‘ copy.

You may also choose to respond to an advertisement for an editor or associate editor post in a journal in your specialist field, when you will then be interviewed by the Publisher for the post. This will of course be in an open competition with others who may also apply.

## **2. What are the typical criteria for an Editor position?**

These would be:

- Expertise and experience in the specialist field related to the journal
- Publication record of a number of articles and /or books (usually in / related to the specialist field)
- Being a reviewer for an international peer reviewed journal

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- Some journals ask for a PhD qualification or a senior research position with equivalent experience in research and scholarship
- Enthusiasm to undertake the Editor role, but ensuring that there is recognition of all aspects of the reality of the role and the work involved
- A commitment to dissemination of knowledge and research in your field of expertise

### **3. What is the main role and responsibility of a journal Editor?**

The key role of a journal editor is to promote scholarship in the specialist field associated with the journal, whilst also promoting this as the best journal to publish in. For any journal the editor will need to encourage new and established authors to submit articles and set up a reliable panel of expert reviewers. Editors are also responsible for offering feedback to reviewers when required and ensure that any feedback to authors is constructive.

In terms of responsibilities:

- An editor should endeavor to be a leader in the specific field of practice underpinning journal content as it helps the journal development, presence and standing within the international community. Their profile needs to be presented in some way on the main journal web -site.
- An editor should also familiarize themselves with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) '[Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors](https://publicationethics.org/files/Code_of_conduct_for_journal_editors_Mar11.pdf)'. See: [https://publicationethics.org/files/Code\\_of\\_conduct\\_for\\_journal\\_editors\\_Mar11.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/Code_of_conduct_for_journal_editors_Mar11.pdf) and for new editors: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/short-guide-ethical-editing-new-editors>

The COPE web-site is an important resource on the topic of ethical conduct of journal editors, authors and reviewers, as well as other aspects of ethical publishing that are relevant to the role of a journal Editor. ( See: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/ethics-toolkit-editors>)

Elsevier also has an extensive number of resources to help new and established editors to undertake their role as editors. Although primarily for Elsevier Editors there are a number of guides which will be of value to any editor, their authors and reviewers. (See their [Publication Ethics Resource Kit \(PERK\)](#), an online resource to support journal editors in handling publishing ethics issues and for other resources associated with the role of an Editor.)

Depending on how the journal is managed and how it is structured, an Editor may have to make all the decisions regarding which articles to accept or reject for publication. However many journals will have an Editorial team, with Associate Editors, Assistant Editors or Section Editors to help the main Editor with making those important decisions. For example, any decision involving major unethical practice, will often

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involve the publisher or their representative alongside the Editor and a Section Editor who has discovered the issue.

An Editor who manages the submission process of an article to the final decision stage is often known as the Handling Editor. However the management of the journal is structured it is essential that authors are aware of the process and who their contact is in the editorial team. This level of information will be found on the journal web site and their guidelines for authors. Both of these should be regularly updated and meet the COPE et al (2018 ) Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing. (See: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarlypublishing>) ( Updated 2022 ) <https://publicationethics.org/files/principles-transparency-best-practice-scholarly-publishing.pdf>

Normally members of the main Editorial team are not directly involved in the peer review process. However all Editors who are involved in managing (handling) an article from submission to first / final decision will offer feedback to authors concerning any revision required for resubmission of an article. This will require of course an understanding of the content as well as the context of the reviewer comments. It is also good practice to offer the author an overview of any feedback in a situation where there are opposite decisions by more than one reviewer. Returning contradictory comments to authors and leave them to decide on what to revise can lead to author confusion, and in some cases withdrawal of their paper from a journal. It is a responsibility of an editor managing a paper to ensure that any feedback is clear regarding any revisions to be made to support successful outcome. Of course making revisions does not guarantee acceptance of a paper.

As an Editor, you will have three or four groups of people to contact on a regular basis: a) the publisher, b) the authors c) the reviewers and d) in some journals direct contact with the production team who manage the publication side of the journal. In particular will be the person known as the Journal Manager (JM).

This latter person will work with the editor to agree which articles to place in each edition, ensure that the Editor does not use more than the agreed number of pages per issue (especially if paper based) and send editor information concerning all articles in their various stages of the editorial process. The Production team member dedicated to that role (JM) may also be responsible for communicating with authors and reviewers directly. They are often the person named on a journal website as the Contact for any journal inquiry. For many large Publishers, their journal production teams can be found in different parts of the world.

#### **4. What is an Editorial Board?**

We will use this one title in the guidance, but in various countries and Publishers this title may be different. For example this may be the Editorial Council, Editorial Committee or other similar name.

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It is important to state the difference between those individuals directly involved in the management and development of the journal from those who may be the main panel of reviewers and also those who act in an advisory capacity. This approach is part of what COPE et al (2018) call the Governance of a journal.

An Editorial Board is primarily made up of a team of individuals that work directly with the Editor to develop the journal and promote new initiatives. Members of the Board may also take responsibility for key activities linked to the journal, for example the Book review editor or Section Editor (such as Section Editor for Systematic Reviews).

The Editorial Board normally appoints a Chairperson, who could be one of the board members or could also be the Publisher. When there are meetings, either face to face, teleconferences or Skype or other online meeting format such as Zoom or Teams, the Chairperson would manage the agenda and the meeting of the Editorial Board.

Editorial Board members are mainly chosen for their expertise in key areas related to the journal or chosen for their international presence in the field. There are instances where excellent long standing reviewers can also be asked to join the Editorial Board. They are normally also from the same expert field as the journal focus. Being invited to become a member of an Editorial Board in a specific subject field is considered to be important as evidence of contributing to your ongoing scholarship and career development.

Depending on the roles and responsibilities set by the publisher, the Editor typically reports directly to the Editorial Board. If a meeting is planned, it is normal practice for both the Publisher and Editor to prepare an update on progress of the journal (from each perspective) and any news related to its overall performance. Items for example such as number of submissions to the journal in a set period of time (1 year is often used), rejection and acceptance rates, citation counts, where cited and other similar information from various sources. Some of this information can be seen on a journal website. Submission and acceptance times of an article has become an important issue for authors, who wish to have their research published as quickly as possible.

A journal's Editorial Board normally undergoes a complete renewal after a set period determined by the Editor and Publisher (three years is an average time). This will involve removing some individuals, inviting others, and renewing some existing members for another term. It is important when inviting a Board member that this issue of term of office is included in the invitation letter to avoid any misunderstandings that can arise. When their term ends it is normal to thank them for their contribution to the journal.

### **5. What is the role of the Editorial Board?**

The role of the Editorial Board can be seen to be:

- To offer expertise in their specialist area
- To review submitted manuscripts

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- To advise on journal policy and scope
- To work with the Editor to ensure ongoing development of the journal
- To identify topics for Special Issues of the journal or recommend a Conference which would promote the journal, which they might also help to organize and/or guest edit any subsequent publications
- To attract new and established authors and article submissions
- To submit some of their own work for consideration, ensuring that they adhere to Conflict of Interest rules and stating their relationship to the journal. This is very important as the journal cannot be seen to publish only papers from members of the Editorial Board.
- It is important that Editorial Boards have a regular communication forum, either face to face in person (Depending on their country of origin, funding availability, etc.) or as more journals are doing today, communicating by teleconference, using Skype / Zoom / Teams type events.
- An Editorial Board is normally not too big in size to ensure effective communication and contributions.

### **6. How does the Editor choose members of the Editorial Board?**

The quality of a journal is in a way reflective of the quality of its Editor(s) and Editorial Board and its members. It is an aspect considered as part of the Journal Standing (or how the community considers their value and contribution to a specific field – and is one of the main criteria for evaluation of a journal for Scopus inclusion and indexing).

As such, it is recommended that a meticulous screening criterion be adopted for their appointment. It is also essential that all those named on these panels / Boards have been officially invited to undertake the role given the importance for that person.

There are no specific rules for the number of Editorial Board members appointed; this is entirely the responsibility of the Editor and / or the Publisher of the journal. In general the main Editorial Board should be smaller than any (International) Advisory Committee / Council, as its members need to support the editor with the immediate issues related to journal activity and development.

Ideally many Editorial Boards are between 10-20 members. It is important that named board members are identified clearly and their affiliation. Some journals also offer a short biography of the members of this Board to add to the information that authors and reviewers can recognize their expertise and be confident in submitting to the journal knowing these experts will be managing their papers. Links to professional profiles can also be seen in some journals as well as links to either or both ORCHID and SCOPUS profiles.

The following issues can be considered when selecting members for your Editorial Board:

- The members need to represent the full geographical range where the journal is published (example: a journal from Malaysia for the Malaysian scholarly community is likely to have its main Board members from Malaysia. If this journal published in Malaysia has International in its title, it would be necessary to see members on the main Board from other countries.



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- An alternative for other journals who do not have International in the title is to have a Board that focusses specifically on the value of the journal to the international community. Members could then be invited to join an International Advisory Board –ensuring widespread dissemination of the journal’s activities and content in addition to that from a main Editorial Board
- Board Members' expertise should represent the subject area (s) covered by the journal's aim and scope (Policy).
- It is important that Board members are active in their specialist field and are therefore up to date with what is happening in research and developments in that field. This is very important as they will in the majority of journals, also be expected to be a reviewer for the journal.
- The Editor should already be familiar with many of these and can invite new members from their colleagues and peers in a subject field. Many of these will be authors who have already published in the journal and/ or written books on related topics. Editors need to be very clear as to why they have chosen to invite someone to the Editorial Board or any other related Board. This information would normally be shared with the Publisher and others especially during their journal meetings.
- Former Guest Editors of special issues and authors of key reviews
- Reviewers whose reviews are of a high standard over a long period of time and who have shown an interest in the direction of the journal.
- Many of these will often have been recognized in some way already by the Editors and it is important that their contribution is recognized at least in an annual statement of their contribution in the journal. This can often be seen as an acknowledgement in the first Volume/ Issue of a journal of a new year.
- Depending on the nature of the journal some Board members may be invited from business or other type of industry. This demonstrates affiliation with people in the field. Editors will exercise caution of course with any conflict of interest areas.
- Individual requests from people who wish to be considered for membership. Your publishing contact or other journal members of the Editorial team, will be able to help you to assess the quality of candidates whom you might not know personally and you can also request a Curriculum Vitae (CV) from them along with a letter outlining their reason for the request and why they are interested in the role and publishing generally. Choosing someone from this route can be discussed with the Publisher/publisher contact.
- Very often editors are approached directly or by e-mail contact to the journal office, by people to ask if they can join the Editorial Board as this is seen as a criterion for promotion in many countries. However, it is always advisable to approach these situations with caution and adopt a policy as above, where CV, letter and discussion with the publisher is required. Again this could be an important joint decision by the main Editorial team of the journal.

### **7. If it is an International journal (that is it has International in its title), what does the Editor need to ensure?**

Throughout the many journal editor workshops that the Scopus team has organized, and the journals received for review by the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB), the Subject Chairs have come across

many journals that claim to be '*International*'. They believe that by including the word '*International*' in the title of the journal, that this would then be seen to be an international focused journal even though the content is seen to be mainly national or regional focused.

As an International journal, Editors need to ensure that the content is from a wide range of international authors, have an Editorial Board that has international expertise and where appropriate that are well represented geographically. Making it clear as well in the invitation to these international board members the expectations that you have of them in terms of reviewing and promoting the journal at international events in their country and to their colleagues who may then consider submitting articles to the journal. Some journals choose to explain in their aims and scope that their journal is of international interest or value, but do not include International in the journal title. The journal still has to demonstrate in various ways how their journal is of international interest.

#### **8. How can an international Advisory Board support a journal and its editor?**

In addition to the above points, setting up an International Advisory Board or equivalent can help support a journal and its editors by sharing best practices with them. Different journals set up their boards and committees differently, so in order to add more structure, their roles should be made explicitly clear to the external community and not simply publish a list of their names on a page for display. An invitation to join this type of Board can also be an ideal way of thanking international reviewers for their excellent reviewing role and their support of the journal.

#### **9. What are journal reviewers?**

All journals that have aspirations of getting indexed in Scopus must have a peer review process. All journal publishers and editors cannot succeed without some kind of peer review process and need to abide by guidelines from a Publishing Ethics organization such as the Committee of Publication Ethics' (COPE, see Guidance for Peer Reviewers: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/cope-ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers>

This is to ensure that the quality of articles is the highest there is in terms of constructive feedback to the authors and editors. Even after the journal has been indexed in Scopus, journal reviewers are essential in maintaining the high standards and quality of the articles in the journals. It is recognized that new developments such as the publication of pre-prints of articles has changed the landscape regarding peer review, but journals will have policies regarding how these articles are managed into their journal submission processes.

See COPE discussion document on Preprints:

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/discussiondocuments/preprints>.

**10. How does the Editor set up a panel of reviewers?**

It is always a challenge for most journals to have good reviewers. One of the ways is to invite peers with expertise in the subject areas related to the journal. The other is to invite authors who have published in the journal. Invited reviewers should be mindful of the total time spent on the review and giving prompt feedback to the editors. They should also communicate with editors regularly so that they can quickly provide feedback when any difficulties are encountered. Some journal editors and their publishers may have a *Call for Reviewers* notice placed on their journal website, so that potential reviewers can contact the journal for further information. They are central to the success of the journal, as they not only contribute to the scholarship of the journal content through their feedback to authors but also offer that external evaluation. There are different types of review which offer various feedback opportunities, and where reviewers range from being completely anonymous to being named as in an Open Review approach.

**11. How much contact should the Editor have with the panel of reviewers?**

There should be regular contact between the Editor and its panel of reviewers. This is to ensure that reviewers are made aware of changes to the journal or they may be invited to comment on a new policy or direction for the journal that the Editorial Board is proposing. Some journals because of large numbers of reviewers on their Panel of Reviewers keep them up to date through regular newsletters, every 3-6 months, which can inform them about new editorial members, editorial updates and other similar issues.

Some publishers and their journals also offer other forms of thanking their reviewers. For example a journal could choose the best review (s) of the month chosen by an Editor, and awarded a certificate to show this excellent contribution. Another option is to send them a letter naming them as a reviewer of the month and publishing their name (s) on the web site. Some of you may wish to consider this kind of activity for your journal. Many journals however are seen to identify and thank all the reviewers who have made a contribution for that year by listing them all on their website.

**12. What should be expected of a member of the peer review panel?**

The panel of peer reviewers should all abide by a Code of Ethics regarding honesty, detecting examples of plagiarism, salami slicing or unethical research practice and giving constructive feedback to both the authors and editors. (See: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/cope-ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers>)

It is expected that they offer constructive feedback to the author and any confidential comments for the editor. Some journals will have specific author guidelines for reviewers to use to guide the actual review and the reviewer and enables them to give feedback in a more structured way. Elsevier offers a general set of

resources on different aspects of peer review and can be accessed at:  
<https://www.elsevier.com/reviewers/how-to-review>.

**13. What guidelines should reviewers have for their role as reviewers?**

All reviewers can use the guidelines as outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) as well as refer to the Publishing Ethics Resource Kit (PERK) (Elsevier) for reference. PERK provides an overview of standards of expected ethical behavior for all parties involved in the act of publishing: the author, the journal editor, the peer reviewer, the publisher and the society of society-owned or sponsored journals.

The duties of reviewers as outlined in PERK include: Contribution to editorial decision, Promptness, Confidentiality, Standards of Objectivity, Acknowledgement of Source as well as Disclosure and Conflicts of interest.

Regardless of where the journal is in its stage of development, it is always good practice to agree and adhere to guidelines as mentioned above. Journals need to offer a clear policy with regards to peer review, from what type they have adopted to whether reviewers are remunerated for their work. Reviewers need very clear guidance on expectations with regards to feedback and most importantly what is expected in terms of time to complete a review. The Journal Manager who manages all the article submission process will work together with the Editor and / or publisher contact to ensure that all aspects have clear guidance and communication channels for reviewers.

**14. How does an Editor ensure that the journal publishes on time and with enough articles per issue?**

It is an Editor's responsibility to ensure that a journal has sufficient articles in their editorial system for all their Issues per year. Editors with new journals who may publish twice a year are required to do this as well as a journal that publishes 12 times a year. To do this they need to manage the journal so that articles are being submitted, being sent to reviewers for review and returned promptly within an agreed timeframe, decisions on revisions, acceptance and rejections made as quickly as possible and new revised papers re-submitted. It is very much an editorial team approach.

An Editor's role is vital to the success of the journal and most importantly the dissemination of research and scholarly articles. Setting up systems for these decisions to be made is an essential part of a new editor role but the outcome will of course depend entirely on the way in which the publisher supports the journal financially and with other resources. New electronic submission systems as well as journals being published only electronically will require a different approach to ensuring articles are published that contribute to the overall aims and scope of a journal.

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Part of the Scopus journal selection criteria stipulates *‘Regularity: No delay in the publication schedule’* and it would be to the advantage of the journal if it is published on a regular basis. If the Subject Chair reviewers see a journal that has for example 3 issues outstanding in being published and that only 2 or 3 articles have been published in previous articles then this is an issue of concern and would be a disadvantage in the review process, as it indicates that the journal has what is often called “copy flow” problems.

It is important that a journal submitted for possible acceptance into Scopus shows evidence of sustained published content over a period of time (now identified as a minimum of 2 years for initial submission) and that this reflects the aims and scope of the journal and its widest authorship in relation to who the journal is published for. Evidence that most articles published are from members of their editorial boards or editors is also considered carefully.

An editor should always be mindful of the number of papers in review and should encourage reviewers to speed up the process if they know the deadline is near. It would therefore be helpful to ensure that everyone is aware of the deadline. We suggest using electronic alerts for reviewers whenever possible. Again this depends on how the journal is managed by the publisher as much as the editor, as it is the publisher who normally has the funding for much of what can be achieved outside of the editorial processes. It is important that how the journal manages their submission to decision making processes is made very clear on the journal web site and its links.

A journal article submission system needs to ensure that the Editor (or the article Handling Editor) is kept updated and informed if there are any queries or challenges with an article at all stages of its journey in the journal. In publishers and journals where there is a large amount of articles being managed through this system, the Journal Manager has a major role to play in this communication.

Authors will also contact the journal to find out where their journal article is in the submission system and whether it has been reviewed yet or whether editors have made a decision on this. Authors need to be made aware of the process their paper will undergo and whether they can check this progress themselves.

It is also important that they contact the best person for their query, and this is often not the main Editor on a journal. Clarity on these kind of issues can be placed in the author or peer reviewer guidelines which are essential sections of a journal that are evaluated in a submission to Scopus. A comprehensive set of author guidelines on all aspects of the journal processes that relate to an article submission is an invaluable resource.

One way to ensure some new articles for publication is having *‘special issues’* of the journal, focusing on a specific topic, as they are slowly becoming a popular source of article contribution. Another way is to have *‘conference special issues’* and for Editors to speak to delegates at various conferences to encourage new authors to contribute articles.

Calling an Issue of the journal “**Special**” would indicate that its content focuses on a **Special collection of papers** that address a **specific topic**, where having a body of evidence published together, can demonstrate the overarching developments that have taken place over time as one option or alternatively that clearly demonstrate the current research addressing **one emerging field**. An example of this latter type of Special Issue could be a multi-disciplinary focus on the environmental and social impact of COVID-19 virus. This would be something that is not a normal approach to a topic but one where **an emerging body of developing evidence can be put forward**.

Being a “**special conference issue**” is an ideal example of **publishing a body of current research evidence** that may have been presented at a conference but are now published as complete papers. They can provide the best possible evidence from the conference itself, and as in many instances built up with papers from key note speakers and invited papers from experts in a field.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we have seen the sharing of content by some Publishers related to research published in its journals, included in an Open Access body of evidence as a way of providing cross-discipline knowledge: the Novel Coronavirus Information Centre (See: <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/coronavirus-information-center>). This is very clearly a Special collection of papers.

Publishers can also issue a ‘**call for papers**’ alert to invite more contribution of articles. All these types of developments for encouraging authors to write and publish in the journal can be made visible on the journal web site which is why an up to date user friendly and informative web site is so important. (See Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing, see: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practicescholarly-publishing>)

There should also be an effective promotion of the journal whenever possible to reach as many potential authors who might want to submit their articles to your journal. One way of supporting this is through use of Social media sources that are journal specific, such as Twitter and Facebook.

#### 15. **How can the Editor check whether the journal is being cited by other journals?**

Knowing whether a journal (not yet accepted for inclusion in Scopus) is already being cited in Scopus gives an idea of the impact it will have if it gets selected for Scopus coverage. It is also a good indicator for authors to see the value of their research to others in their field. Use Scopus to search for (different variations of) the journal name in the “**Source Title**” field. The search will likely result in zero results or documents published in Scopus covered journals with similar journal names. Then click “**View secondary documents**” to find cited references from sources covered in Scopus that cite the journal name you searched for. Usually some

trial and error with different name variants will give the best results. (See: <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/how-scopus-works/metrics/citescore>)

An Editor can also check via this search how many of these citations are actually being cited from their own journal and how many from other journals in their relevant subject area. A journal for example where all articles identified as a main first source which can then be seen to be only cited by authors who have also published in the journal will require careful observation.

In fields where the main journal sources are in a specialist field of only a small number of journals for example, there is likely to be a cross over of authors publishing in this group, and where citations of their own work are likely to be higher than usual. However an Editor also needs to see that the journal content is visible across different publishing formats, such as research reports and books. Which journals and which authors are citing the journal as well, and from which countries, can also be an indicator of the value of the content to an international audience. This is important if a journal claims to be internationally relevant, and essential if a journal has International in the title.

For a journal that has already been included in Scopus, the Editor will need to maintain a close observation on where the journal is being cited and who is citing different articles. Journals can use this as one established approach to determine the impact of various articles either on the specific field, and in many cases in the medical field for example, for any possible impact on patient outcomes or care delivery. In this situation using the CiteScore metrics tool will be invaluable alongside other different metrics of value. (See: Training Video:

[https://elsevier.widen.net/s/fgdshfnl5r/acad\\_lib\\_sc\\_vid\\_metrics-l3-how-to-view-journal-metrics-fora-title-in-scopus](https://elsevier.widen.net/s/fgdshfnl5r/acad_lib_sc_vid_metrics-l3-how-to-view-journal-metrics-fora-title-in-scopus) and direct search: <https://www.scopus.com/sources>

#### 16. **What structure should a journal have?**

The structure that a journal takes gradually develops over time but first and foremost, it depends on the aims and scope of the journal. (Sometimes called *journal policy*) A journal may choose to have a structure which includes an Editor in Chief, a Deputy Editor, then an Associate Editor who has more responsibility with article decisions, and then have Sub-editors for different sections of the journal. For example, as well as an Editor in Chief there might be a *Global Health Editor in a Public Health journal* where one of its aims and scope is *to encourage knowledge sharing in current Global Health Issues*.

The best structure is what works best for the Editors, Publishers and Editorial Board. There is no prescriptive structure, only examples from a wide range of international journals.

It is expected however that whatever the structure, it is visible on the journal web site and will have information for example about the journal aims and scope, author guidelines, submission process, Open Access costs, any article publishing costs (APC) Access to current issues and archived ones. It will, also inform readers who the Editors and Board members are, together with information regarding where they

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work and often in the case of the Editors, a short biography or link to a professional CV site .Translation facilities should also be made visible *whenever possible*, for any one accessing the web site or journal information.

All articles submitted to Scopus are required to have an English language Abstract. This is an essential criteria for all journals submitted to Scopus as it is one of the 5 essential criteria to be considered for being accepted for the first Stage of the Scopus evaluation process.

### **17. How many Editors should a journal have?**

This very much depends on the Publisher and the budget for all remunerated posts. There are no specific rules but ideally there should only *be one main Editor or Editor-in-chief*. (Occasionally this role may be divided into co-editor posts) This is the person who offers the overall leadership to the journal and undertakes the main role in its overall development and management. They are normally the main link to the Publisher or Publisher contact person.

Then there can be a number of *Associate Editors* and / or *Section Editors* who will have specific responsibilities within the journal structure.

If there are several sub-editors in place, the Editor must outline the responsibilities for each role and who among them will undertake total responsibility for all decisions made while ensuring the quality of the decisions. This type of total responsibility is more often seen in journals where is a large volume of articles and where the main Editor is no longer in a position to be able to undertake all the decisions on their own given the volume of work involved. Some journals which have international content, may have specific Country Editors to manage articles in those specific countries. These could include a US Editor, a South American Editor and a European Editor.

However, it is important to note that the Editor still has the overall responsibility for the decision making process and the overall quality of the journal and its content. It is important to ensure that the structure of the journal and its editors is made visible to the reader, especially names and affiliation of the individuals. (COPE et al 2018) Some journals also include photographs as well but that is a personal preference for that journal. It is important that information is offered with regards to the background of the main editors so that authors and readers can see their place in relation to overall subject field of the journal. COPE have published a very helpful short guide to ethical editing for new editors which refers to some of these various roles:

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/short-guide-ethical-editing-new-editors>

### **18. How do the Editor and Editorial Board decide on its aims and scope?**

**For new Journals:**



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When a decision has been made to set up a new journal, the appointed editor would initially decide a draft version of the actual aims and scope. The editor would have a vision of the journal's future direction and the types of articles it hopes to attract. This would be discussed with the publisher at some stage, depending on the actual involvement in the journal at this level by the Publisher. As the journal Editorial Board is established, both the editor and the Board would then collectively discuss and decide on the aims and scope of the journal, using the initial draft document. Consulting other journals' will also ensure that journal titles are not the same as often the aims and scope has a clear link to this and needs to reflect each other. Having an aim that does not reflect the title for example may confuse authors as well as readers.

**For established Journals:** The Editor and Editorial Board may wish to develop the established journal and may wish to amend the original aims and scope. This is normal practice, (for example when there is a change in main Editor role) and the process would be similar to the one for new journals. Following agreement it is essential that this change be disseminated to potential authors and reviewers as soon as possible. This can be undertaken through the main journal website for authors and an email to all the journal reviewers and Board members. In addition those with an effective social media strategy can disseminate any changes through that medium.

### **19. How often should a journal undertake a review of its activities?**

For new journals the Editor may wish to review its activities every three months but again this is an editorial decision. The publisher may also have their own requirements. Once they have established the journal and it is becoming known to authors and reviewers in that research community, they may then choose to review it once every six months. Ultimately, it depends on the publisher of the journal to decide what is the best policy, based on their expectations of the journal. The main Editor however will undertake an ongoing check on all aspects of the journal as part of their management and leadership role and to ensure that the content continues to match the aims and scope. A journal in Scopus would need to ensure that there is sufficient copy or flow of articles submitted and accepted for publication, as well as demonstrating value of its content for others in a specific field through increasing citations of its content in the international database.

### **20. What is a Special issue of the journal?**

A '*Special Issue*' is a collection of papers focused on a specific topic. It may also be a collection of papers from a Conference associated with the journal or linked Association. Both of which can then be used to promote the journal. (See Point 14 for more details of meaning of a Special Issue)

*Special Issues* can also be a retrospective collection of papers published over time e.g. *Problem-based learning 1999- 2012*. There are also Special Issues that are used to market the journal and related journal activities such as international journal conferences. The progress of electronic management of journals enables Editors to promote these types of initiatives in very unique ways, and even in journals that do not

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have the same resources as the major Publishers can now showcase their journal content in very unique ways. It is important to ensure that there is an editor and publisher collective view on why these types of publication initiatives are going to be of value to the journal and most importantly to the authors who will make a contribution to the publication.

### **21. How much time does an Editor use to undertake the role?**

The time taken varies between journals and their Publishers. If it is a new journal, an editor would probably need more time on developing the journal, improving copy flow (article submissions) of the journal, communicating with and developing the reviewer panelists, as well as working with the Editorial Board members.

Once the journal becomes more established and visible, then an editor could work up to 2 whole days or more on the journal. This again depends on the Editor –Publisher agreements and the number of other editors involved in the journal structure.

This is unlike managing the review process or deliberating over decisions made by journal board members where it might take anywhere from 1-3 days.

Another aspect of the role is speaking to colleagues, through teleconferences or other communication system. This is in addition to the ongoing daily email correspondence with authors, potential authors, paper submissions and inquiries which is very difficult to quantify on the amount of time spent in total. It is all dependent on the way the journal operates and its publisher requirements. The Editor role does generally increase in workload as the journal gains more success as a publication.

One other aspect is whether or not the journal has an Administrative Editor appointed specifically for the journal who manages the day to day correspondence or a production manager who manages the publication processes and electronic submission who may work in another country, as in the case of Elsevier journals. Due to changes in the electronic submission system and the speed in correspondence, the time demands on an editor will increase exponentially.

Many large International journals have Editors who have a paid honorarium to undertake their role but again, regardless of the journal size, this is a confidential matter with the Publisher. For some journals in early development, this could also be remuneration in the form of time to be allocated to the new editor in agreement with their place of work and as part of the ongoing development of scholarship of the organization.

The main issue to learn is to not underestimate the work involved in undertaking the role- either as a new journal at the beginning of a journey or that required to maintain a journal at its highest level of achievement and scholarship contribution to an individual community.

## 22. What should an Editor look for in an article?

Depending on the type of journal and how many issues it publishes per year the editor will receive a varied number of articles on a regular basis. How these articles are submitted can also determine what is possible in relation to checking the essentials of a submission. These would be issues such as an agreement of all the authors on the content of a paper and that it is all their own work. The addition of an Ethics committee approval with research project number is also requested in many journals, in addition to authors noting it in the research conduct section.

However, once the articles appear in the 'Editorial desk', the Editor (s) responsible should normally check the articles to see if they meet the minimum criteria for publication in the journal. This will ensure that some articles are rejected without being sent out to review and additional work for reviewers. The importance of having comprehensive journal author guidelines and a possible check list for authors to use prior to submission of an article, cannot be underestimated. Many articles can be rejected if authors have chosen not to reflect the relevant word limit for example.

In general an Editor is looking for essential characteristics in an article in order to maintain the quality of the journal.

### *Examples are:*

- The author has clearly read the aims and scope of the journal because the article meets that requirement
- It should be well written in the language of the journal with a good abstract in both English and specific language (non – English language journals) and the same in English language journals. In either journals it is important to make the article easy to read without complicated language
- It should fit with the aims and scope of the journal and where possible it offers new knowledge and research findings (This will be dependent of the journal).
- A journal which uses a similarity checking tool such as Ithenticate, will check all articles on submission. This may be first undertaken using the electronic system and a record made of the similarity count for the Editor. Managing similarity checks is important and essential that each paper is considered on an individual basis.  
*Similarity of text does not imply plagiarism.*
- If it has good reviews from the reviewers with constructive comments for revision (***very few articles are accepted without some required revision***) it is expected that the authors will consider these comments and revise accordingly.

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- The article should not have any unethical publishing nor unethical research practices (see: [https://www.elsevier.com/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/856659/Ethics-in-Research-and-PublicationMarch-2019.pdf](https://www.elsevier.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/856659/Ethics-in-Research-and-PublicationMarch-2019.pdf): for factsheets on plagiarism, salami slicing, research fraud, duplicate submission, authorship and conflict of interest). Ensure that the journal has a way of checking for plagiarised content on submission of an article. How this is undertaken and if using a specific tool to do this has to be made very clear on the journal web site. It is a concern when Journals which are not clear on this and simply state they choose to check articles using a range of tools without naming any at all. **It is also important not to offer any explanation on what percentage of similarity that a journal will accept from an authored article at any stage after submission, as this can be seen as an indicator that this is acceptable practice. Journals could make clear what type of similarity they would accept in a submission, such as Unpublished PhD work or pre-print content.**  
(See Elsevier statement as an example: <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/editors-update/clarification-of-our-policy-on-prior-publication>)
- If it is a research article the authors should have included both an ethics statement regarding permission for the research to be conducted but also if human subjects involved it is also important to include a statement concerning protecting of research participants (**Research Ethics**) Guidance on this is usually found in Author guidelines on the topic of expectations of a submitted article.
- It is expected as good practice that when authors submit their articles for review that a letter should accompany that article which states that all the authors are in agreement with the submission and that the paper is not being sent to another journal nor has it been published anywhere. Journals can indicate their requirements for all these issues in their **Guidelines for authors**.
- It is good practice to ensure that authors have considered all the author guidelines for the journal in relation to the article structure and content.

### **23. What should the Editor do if a case of plagiarism or other type of unethical publication practice is suspected?**

There is now greater awareness for the need of publishers and editors to be more vigilant and report infringement of publication ethics.

On a practical level the first thing an editor should do is conduct an early investigation using iThenticate/CrossCheck or other anti-plagiarism software if they have access to these programmes. Many journals now undertake this checking on submission of all articles that they do not immediately reject for other reasons. Tools such as Ithenticate can offer a full report of similarity scoring but each paper has to be addressed individually. Some similarity for example occurs from PhD theses found on the author's university web site and many publishers consider these kinds of documents as UNPUBLISHED. That is not to say that

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papers that arise from these should copy large sections from them without making the necessary changes for an article for publication.

If they do not have access to one of these special tools then they need to access by other means initially the articles that are related to the suspected case of plagiarism or other unethical practice to check accuracy of either the reviewer feedback and observations or the Editors own observations. This may be easier if they already have access to Platforms such as Science Direct for Elsevier articles. Antiplagiarism software however will not specifically identify “[salami slicing](#)”. But can indicate whether the author has published more articles from the same study with similar sections being used across a number of these.

See the [Elsevier Ethics Toolkit](#) for more information about “salami slicing” and other examples of publication ethics.

If the editor determines that there is case of plagiarism to be investigated then if the journal has a publisher contact who is in regular contact then they need to be notified. This will ensure that any communication with an author has their support .Some publishers have templates for Editors to use in such cases (see: Elsevier own guidance for authors for templates and other linked resources: <http://www.elsevier.com/editors/perk>). The COPE web site has excellent tools and pathway documents to help Editors manage different unethical author practices. (See COPE Flowcharts for managing these issues: <https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Flowcharts>)

It is imperative that each case is looked at individually and therefore we do not advocate the use of one statement of actions to penalize the offender. Each case is considered separately and editors will need to decide if it is a deliberate action on the part of the author or is it due to lack of understanding of the requirements of ethical writing. This can happen for new authors or some authors where translation to English is often difficult.

An example of this is where there are no words / phrases in that language that translate into English, and a developing practice noted by some Editors is the ‘borrowing’ of words, phrases or often sentences that are considered appropriate for what they mean to say .

Unfortunately for some authors this has proved problematic when the article is checked for similarity, because in some instances the ‘borrowing’ of too many phrases, sentences and words means that a case of plagiarism is then detected.

Care is needed to ensure that this practice does not extend beyond what is helpful to the authors in their translation of their work. Many of the large Publishers offer the services of a Translator which can avoid this practice. It is important to note that someone translating a scientific paper into English is also aware for example, of the best way to explain / translate technical, medical or health terms as relevant to the article content. An incorrect translation can translate into confusing meaning or in some cases insensitive meaning.

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Ensuring that the English abstract is accurately translated with correct meaning and accurate information on article content is very important for a journal submission to Scopus.

There are two main instances where cases of plagiarism can be identified – at the reviewer stage and at the post-publication stage. This latter situation is slightly different in that many of these are identified by the authors who have been plagiarized or researchers using the articles that have been plagiarized from.

If these are agreed after investigation by the Editor to be plagiarized, the paper will be withdrawn from a journal and this will also be stamped across the paper wherever it is archived. The author in such circumstances may well experience serious consequences from their employer.

Each individual journal needs to ensure that it has policies in place to manage unethical writing in articles and in the conduct of the research itself. It is also important that it has a policy for appeals by authors against the Editorial decision. It is also to be noted that authors also have a responsibility in how they appeal against a decision and in no way should there be any intention to pressurize the Editor in any way to make a change to that decision.

To learn more about plagiarism and other breaches of publication ethics, you can refer to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines here: <http://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines>. They also have flow charts or decision making pathways for journal editors to consider when unethical practice is suspected. COPE also publish a wide range of case examples related to unethical practice which are an invaluable resource on ethical decision making: See <https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Case>

### **24. Should a journal have standard templates for decision letters to authors?**

The Editor and Editorial Board need to decide what is the best practice for their journal, and include a clear policy for unethical practice and what will occur should this happen and of course at what stage in the publication process it did happen initially. Links to such organisations as COPE are also invaluable as authors can see that this is not simply a decision made by a journal editor alone but has a clear evidence base. It is a very good idea to have templates if possible, which saves time in a busy workload but can also be changed to specific situations. Standard templates may also be useful to work with for Reviewers. Journals which have an electronic submission system for authors will often have a structured response form for reviewers to complete on line .

### **25. What is good practice in thanking reviewers for their hard work?**

Reviewers play an important part in ensuring the quality of a journal as well as contributing to the scholarship of the articles they review, and need to be thanked for this key role. Some journals acknowledge their

reviewers and thank them for their role in a published list at the end of every year, either on the web site or in the final issue of the journal for the year. (See Point 11 for more details)

Some journals also offer access to journal resources to reviewers to help them with their reviewing role and also professional one (such as access to Scopus for Elsevier journal reviewers).

**26. What information should a journal have on its website about the Editor and Editorial Boards and / members?**

The journal website should ideally contain profiles of the Editor and its Editorial board members. Indication of the role of the Editor-in-Chief, (Associate) Editor(s) and Editorial Board Members is also very helpful information. A short biography would also be helpful or links to the Editor's workplace profile. Potential authors can then see the expertise of the Editorial team in relation to a journal focus. This information is important when the Scopus Subject Chairs are reviewing and evaluating a journal, so that they can check if the accuracy of the information and also that the named individuals are not fraudulent. It is also important to ensure that Editorial Board members have their place of work identified, contact details and any information or links that identify them as the real person who has agreed to be named on the journal web site and journal issues. (See COPE et al 2018) It is also important for the Editor to ensure that all Board members names are kept up to date to ensure that there is no misrepresentation of information.

**27. Is there a specific rule about allowing authors to have direct communication with an Editor about their paper?**

In most instances, the editor should have the unique email address for the journal which comes either direct to them or via their publishing system depending on the inquiry. So authors can send an inquiry either directly or to the Administration editors /Journal managers regarding their articles. This can often be a query about how long will the review process be and when will they get a decision about their article. The Editor responsible for that article can of course reply to the author regarding those type of queries, as it is matter of courtesy ; but many journals will however make it known to an author in the response letter when a paper is submitted, that continuing to send in queries on article progress could impact on decision making. Until the review process is complete and a decision is reached about an article then the editor does not normally have any other contact with that author. It is dependent on the actual structure of the Journal and what has been agreed as routes of communication between everyone involved with the journal. There is no one rule as to this process and is a journal choice, as long as it is all made clear for the authors.

Some potential authors may however contact the Editor with an inquiry as to whether their research would be of interest and value to the journal. Again it is courtesy on the behalf of the editor to respond to such inquires and if often an opportunity to encourage new authors to submit their work.

**28. How much editing of an article should the Editor actually undertake?**

This is a very difficult question in many ways because the reviewer may well have given feedback to the author directly onto a script, depending on the system that a journal has to allow this. If an editor has a large volume of articles that have been recommended to be revised then it should be the authors' responsibility to ensure that grammar and spelling is correct. The editor of course may highlight in their decision about an article that the authors need to attend to this type of problem.

There should be minimal amount of editing if any. For those authors writing in English as second language some publishers now offer a service for a fee to help authors who do not have English as their first language with this issue. It is often seen in feedback that a reviewer or editor may recommend that someone who speaks and uses English for example be invited to review and comment on a paper from that viewpoint. It is important to recognize that an article does not simply rely on English words but that they are the correct words for that explanation or meaning. Like all languages if words are translated as one possible way that the meaning of that word could indicate something else entirely. Some minor editing or recommendations from the editor is part of giving feedback. *(See Point 23 for additional information).*

**29. How long, should articles in revision be retained on the journal database / records prior to removal?**

Different publishers have different time limits prior to removal. However, most if not all will archive the material. This can then be made accessible at a later stage if need be. It is very important that an editor ensures that an archiving policy is visible on their main web site information or in linked material.

If authors have not revised their articles in 6 months or so without offering any explanation, then the research reported will begin to be out of date in terms of its evidence –base and after 2 years in the system it will be evident that the author is not going to revise the paper. It is again an Editorial and publisher decision as to how you manage this process. Most journals will have a set limit on how long an article that has not been revised stays in the electronic system and editors make every effort to inform these authors that their papers undergoing revision will be removed at a certain date. All these kind of decisions for Editors and their Journal managers / publishers take place beyond the visible information – but a statement might be of value to place in the author and / or peer review decision making guidance so that it is transparent. It is also very important to make a note with that information, that should authors decide to submit that paper elsewhere they need to let the journal editors know, especially if it has been accepted for publication elsewhere. It is the author's responsibility to do this to avoid possible duplicate publication issues.

Editors are often disappointed when authors who have had excellent feedback from reviewers do not then pursue their advice for revision. In some cases, they also do not inform the journal that they will not be revising and resubmitting their article either.



**30. What is meant by ' Academic contribution to the field '?**

It is the extent to which the journal makes a unique contribution compared with existing literature/ research evidence in the field. The greater the impact in terms of scientific advancement, societal, environmental and economic the more it can be seen to contribute to the field or discipline it comes from. The academic contribution to the field as it relates to the journal and its content is in essence the combined works of all the articles in that journal. Journal editors look for articles that are innovative and report excellent research and developments in the specialist field. This is not for just one journal issue but the combined effort of all the journal issues over time. The CSAB / Subject Chairs evaluate this aspect of the journal, and one specific indicator for this is in the number of citations, and which journals are citing the articles, especially those considered to be the best in their field for scientific content, and also their contribution to wider science in that field. Beyond the quality of citations (e.g. in high impact journals), a journal's academic contribution can also be ascertained by the cited literature in the articles it publishes. In general, good or cutting-edge articles tend to address important scholarly debates or scientific issues that would have already had some prior work published in leading outlets in the field(s). This will of course vary subject by subject and field by field.

Making a unique contribution to the field is always a challenge of course for Editors of new journals not yet well known but if many of the quality issues raised in these FAQs are considered in the development of the journal and its ongoing internal evaluation this contribution to the field should make an impact.

**Summary**

This Scopus FAQs paper is only an introduction to the important role in any journal – that of the main Editor. It not only brings peer recognition for the person in the role but also the much wider ability to support and lead change. It also promotes that whoever is in that role knows that leading and managing a journal needs to be seen as a team effort, supported by its Publisher.

A journal has a unique responsibility to promote and publish not only best practice and research but also to ensure that this is of the best quality and adheres to the highest ethical standards of the conduct of research and its publishing.

We hope that you have found these FAQ's helpful in your role and we look forward to hearing from you with regards to their value and of course if you have any further FAQ's we can add to this paper. The document will be updated on a regular basis .

### **Additional Internet Resources**

For additional resources about the role in general and more specifically as related to submitting it for possible inclusion in Scopus and best practice in scholarly publishing the following links will provide valuable resources:

- 1) Content Policy and selection :<https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/how-scopusworks/content/content-policy-and-selection>
- 2) Title suggestion: <https://suggestor.step.scopus.com/suggestTitle/step1.cfm>
- 3) FAQs for the Content selection process,  
[https://www.elsevier.com/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/1192583/ScopusFAQContentSelectionProcess20210928.pdf](https://www.elsevier.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1192583/ScopusFAQContentSelectionProcess20210928.pdf)
- 4) COPE et al 2018 Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Practice in full:  
<https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practicescholarly-publishing>
- 5) Ethics Toolkit for a Successful editorial office: <https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Guidelines>
- 6) Elsevier for Editors: <https://www.elsevier.com/editors>

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