Research and publishing ethics

Authorship, plagiarism and responsibilities

What does it mean to be an author?

An “author” is generally considered to be someone who has made substantive intellectual contributions to a published study.

Types of authorship

- First author: the person who conducts or supervises the data collection, analysis, presentation and interpretation of the results and also puts together the paper for submission.
- Co-author: makes intellectual contributions to the data analysis and contributes to data interpretation, reviews each paper draft, must be able to present the results, defend the implications and discuss study limitations.

Avoid ghost authorship: excluding authors who participated in the work.
Avoid scientific writers and gift authors: including authors who did not contribute to the work.

What does plagiarism consist of?

Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, or words without giving appropriate credit, including those obtained through confidential review of others’ research proposals and manuscripts.

CrossCheck is a huge database of 30+ million articles, from 50,000+ journals, from 400+ publishers.

Many Elsevier journals now check every submitted article using CrossCheck.

Work that can be plagiarised includes...

- Words/language ideas
- Findings
- Writings
- Graphic representations
- Computer programs
- Diagrams
- Narratives
- Illustrations
- Information
- Lectures
- Printed material
- Electronic material
- Any other original work

Correct citation is key

Declare conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest can take many forms:

- Direct financial: employment, stock ownership, grants, patents.
- Indirect financial: honoraria, consultancies, mutual fund ownership, expert testimony.
- Career and intellectual: promotion, direct rival institutional dependencies.
- Personal belief.

The consequences

Consequences vary depending on the misconduct and the journal, institutions, and funding bodies involved.

Authors could:

- Have articles retracted (carrying a note why they were retracted, e.g. for plagiarism).
- Have letters of concern or reprimand written to them.
- Institutions and funding bodies could carry out disciplinary action.

Editors’ view: what makes a good reviewer?

- Provides a thorough and comprehensive report
- Submits the report on time
- Provides well-founded comments for authors
- Gives constructive criticism
- Demonstrates objectivity
- Provides a clear recommendation to the editor

Comments to the editor

1. Comment on novelty and significance
2. Recommend whether the manuscript is suitable for publication
3. Confidential comments will not be disclosed to the author(s)

Your ultimate checklist for reviewing a paper

First impressions
- Is the research original, novel and important to the field?
- Has the appropriate structure and language been used?

Abstract
- Is it really a summary?
- Does it include key findings?
- Is it an appropriate length?

Introduction
- Is it effective, clear and well organized?
- Does it really introduce and put into perspective what follows?
- Suggest changes in organization and point authors to appropriate citations.
- Be specific – don’t write “the authors have done a poor job”

Methodology
- Can a colleague reproduce the experiments and get the same results?
- Are the data shown in tables and figures?
- Does the methodology make sense?
- Are there any obvious omissions?
- Ask yourself whether the manuscript should be published at all

Conclusion
- Comment on importance, validity and generality of conclusions
- Request rephrasing of unjustified conclusions
- Request removal of redundancies and summaries
- The abstract, not the conclusion, summarizes the study

References, tables and figures
- Check accuracy, number and citation appropriateness
- Request on any footnotes
- Comment on tables, their quality and readability
- Assess completeness of legends, headers and axis labels
- Check presentation consistency
- Comment on need for colour in figures

Why should you review?

Take

Agree with initial presentation
Revises rather than reviews
Starts comments with journal and editors

GIVE

Academic duty

Authors should be made before starting to write up the paper.

Peer review

...is critical because it
- Improves the quality of the published paper
- Ensures previous work is acknowledged
- Determines the importance of findings
- Detects plagiarism and fraud
- Plays a central role in academic career development

...adheres to the principles that
- It is a well understood concept
- Without it there is no control in scientific communication
- Journal editors evaluate and reject certain articles prior to external peer review

Correct citation is key

Good citation:
- Clearly cites all material
- Acknowledges all prior work
- Avoids excessive self-plagiarism
- Avoids self-promotion
- Incomplete
- Inaccurate

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Results and discussion
- Suggest improvements in the way data is shown
- Comment on general logic and on justification of interpretations and conclusions
- Comment on the number of figures, tables and schemes
- Write concisely and precisely which changes you recommend
- List separately suggested changes in style, grammar and other small changes
- Suggest additional experiments or analyses
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How to review manuscripts

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