



# Statement on Publication Ethics for Editors and Publishers

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The digitization and related developments in journal editing and publishing necessitate increasing the awareness of all stakeholders of science communication in the emerging global problems and possible solutions. Journal editors and publishers are frequently encountered with the fast-growing problems of authorship, conflicts of interest, peer review, research misconduct, unethical citations, and inappropriate journal impact metrics. While the number of erroneous and unethical research papers and wasteful, or 'predatory', journals is increasing exponentially, responsible editors are urged to 'clean' the literature by correcting or retracting related articles. Indexers are advised to implement measures for accepting truly influential and ethical journals and delisting sources with predatory publishing practices. Updating knowledge and skills of authors, editors and publishers, developing and endorsing recommendations of global editorial associations, and (re) drafting journal instructions can be viewed as potential tools for improving ethics of academic journals. The aim of this Statement is to increase awareness of all stakeholders of science communication of the emerging ethical issues in journal editing and publishing and initiate a campaign of upgrading and enforcing related journal instructions.

**Keywords:** Scientific Associations; Guidelines; Publication Ethics; Editorial Policies; Periodicals as Topic

## INTRODUCTION

Principles of publication ethics and professional values may differ across disciplines and countries. However, there are common standards enabling the indexing of scholarly journals by multidisciplinary and specialist bibliographic databases. The adherence to the globally applicable standards of science writing, reviewing, editing, soliciting manuscripts, and publishing is the only way of improving visibility of national and international periodicals and impacting science.

The digitization of the publishing process and post-publication communication open up new avenues for implementing new technologies throughout the academic writing and publishing and international recognition of ethical and truly influential research. The emerging ethical task of responsible editors and publishers is to preserve their authors' scientific works, index in the global bibliographic services, and archive in widely visible repositories.

Journal editors have to continuously update their knowledge and skills in research and publication ethics by networking with colleagues from all over the world, joining national and international editorial associations and conducting editorial research. Familiarizing with the recommendations and statements of the established editorial associations can be instrumental for improving the quality of the journals. Good examples of the globally endorsed documents covering publication ethics are presented by the Council of Science Editors (CSE), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). All these documents can be used for (re)drafting instructions of biomedical and other journals.

The aim of this Statement is to increase awareness of all stakeholders of science communication of the emerging ethical issues in journal editing and publishing and initi-

ate a campaign of upgrading and enforcing related journal instructions.

## MAIN COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL PUBLISHING AND POST-PUBLICATION COMMUNICATION

### Ethical authorship and disclosure of authors' contributions

While the authorship criteria differ across disciplines (but not countries), editors and publishers should follow the best available ethical standards of presenting the authors' contributions and recommend listing as co-authors only those with significant involvement in the scientific research and manuscript writing (1). The journal instructions should include points on applicable criteria of authorship, preferred listing and abbreviating author names and presenting author profiles. The global initiative of the Open Research and Contributor ID (ORCID), which is integrated with bibliographic databases, digital archives and numerous scholarly platforms, is the best option for linking author names with their previously published works and academic achievements (2,3). The ORCID IDs can help display credentials of peer reviewers and editorial board members alike.

### Responsibility for the integrity of scholarly works and post-publication communication

Taking responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of all parts of the manuscript is obligatory for all those listed as co-authors (4). Additionally, corresponding authors should be available for coordinating revisions, contacting editors, and communicating with readers post-publication (5). Post-publication comments and authors' responses are inseparable components of scientific culture.

### Acknowledgments

Scholarly works published in reputable indexed periodicals are too often the result of collective efforts of not only authors but also other contributors, and particularly authors' editors, translators and agents of commercial editing companies (6). Listing names of all these contributors in the acknowledgments is an ethical act, which informs the readers about supporting contributions. It is the responsible editors' task to reveal and present to the attention of their readers all the contributions yielded the scholarly publications.

### Peer review

Different peer review models have been employed across academic journals with variable results: editorial (internal), single-blind, double-blind, and open (public) (7,8). The gained global experience points to the importance of implementing models of internal and/or external quality controls and presenting in the journal instructions details/statistics of the peer review. The choice of the model lies with the responsible editors, reviewers,

and publishers. Archiving reviewer comments and reporting datelines of the peer review (submission, revision, acceptance dates) is required for preserving the integrity of the whole publishing process. The reviewers deserve the incentives which can differ across and within the journals. One of the widely applicable incentives is the annual reviewer acknowledgment (9) which can be used by indexers as a proof of the existence and internationalization of the peer review.

### Conflicts of interest

Authors' reviewers' and editors' conflicts arise when their primary and secondary interests contradict each other. Such conflicts may arise in any discipline and negatively affect the validity of related scholarly works. It is a good service to the authors, reviewers and editorial board members to define potential and actual conflicts of interest in the journal instructions and guide them how to report commercial and other conflicts (10,11). Reviewers and editors with potential conflicts of interest should delegate their reviewer and decision-making duties to colleagues free of any commercial or other conflicting interests in the contents of the manuscripts. The readers deserve the right to be informed about the existing conflicts of the authors.

### Research misconduct

By submitting their manuscripts to academic journals, the authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of research, adherence to ethics standards (e.g., approval of their study by local ethics committee), respect of copyrights, and absence of plagiarized ideas, texts and graphics (12,13). All these points can be incorporated in the cover letters, which are submitted along with the manuscripts (14). Journal editors should comprehensively evaluate research and publication ethics points and consider testing manuscripts to avoid appropriations of others' and recycling own ideas, texts, graphics, and reference lists.

### Corrections and retractions

Published journal articles may contain honest errors, incorrect, misleading, plagiarized, or otherwise fraudulent information, which is not always possible to detect at the peer review and editing (15,16). Also, there may be problems with authorship, nondisclosed conflicts of interest, ethics approval, and violation of copyrights. Whenever all these instances are surfaced, responsible editors are obliged to contact the authors and consider either publishing corrections or retracting published items. Most recent retractions are currently tracked and publicly analyzed (<http://retractionwatch.com/>). Journal editors should familiarize themselves with literature correcting policies and incorporate statements on corrections and retractions in their journal instructions.

### Referencing and citing

Each relevant reference is a credit to previously published item and an option to avoid claims of appropriating others' texts and graphics (12). Wherever possible, referencing should help the readers to locate and retrieve primary sources from widely visible scholarly platforms (17). Systematic searches through bibliographic databases may help the authors to cite the most relevant and widely visible items. Authors should refrain from abundant and/or irrelevant self-citations. Responsible editors and reviewers are in a position to recommend additional relevant references or omissions/replacements of invisible, irrelevant, retracted, or fraudulent items. However, it is absolutely unacceptable to recommend citations aimed at boosting a journal's impact indicators.

### Journal impact metrics

Re-using and citing previously published scientific facts and ideas is currently the basis of measuring scientific impact. Tracking citations by Scopus and Web of Science and displaying related metrics on the journals' platforms is the only ethical way of informing the readers of the journal impact (18). Relying on the 'impact factors' issued by spurious impact agencies or organizations weighing factors other than citations is unacceptable.

### Ethical research and publishing environment

Publishers and academic institutions, and particularly their research & development departments, should improve knowledge and skills of their researchers, authors and editors by regularly arranging topical trainings on research reporting and publication ethics (19). Editorial associations have their share of responsibility for educating their members and (re)drafting recommendations on science writing, editing and publishing (20).

## POINTS ON WASTEFUL, OR 'PREDATORY', PUBLISHING

With the growing opportunities for digitization and open-access publishing, the number of periodicals with substandard publishing practices, which include, but not limited to soft, poor or nonexistent peer review and editing, is also increasing (21). Wasteful, or 'predatory', publishing dashes prospects of science growth in emerging scientific powers, damages reputation of ongoing researchers, who are new to the publishing market, and sets a poor example for other periodicals (22). Adding low quality and unethical articles to the global pool of scholarly items, indexed by prestigious databases and archives, is a threat to the pillars of the scientific evidence accumulation. There is the list of predatory open access publishers and standalone journals, hijacked journals, and journal metrics presented by Jeffrey Beall (<https://scholarlyoa.com/>).

The aim of the predatory publishing practices is to gain finan-

cial profits out of poor services to the authors. Predatory journals publish redundant, poorly edited, unchecked, unreadable, or rejected by other journals items. Some of the indexed predatory journals may be contacted by commercial editing agents and companies, which establish unethical channels for brokering articles and corrupting the relationships between the authors and publishers. Such brokering services are aimed at streamlining the flows of articles to predatory journals and charging authors differentially, based on the indexing status and impact indicators of the journals. The following are points of interest to all stakeholders of science writing and publishing.

1. Wasteful, or 'predatory', publishing stems from poor research environment and lack of science writing and editing experience (23,24). Relevant trainings of scientific authors and editors are recommended to improve the quality of scholarly works and publish them in the best target journals.
2. Wasteful practices are not limited to open-access predatory publishers, journals and impact metrics agencies. There may be also 'predatory' commercial agents and editing agencies, contacting individual authors and academic institutions and offering editing and brokering services, which often result in unethical publications in predatory journals. Scientific authors should be informed of such unethical services and advised not to engage in any agreements with 'predatory' agents and editing agencies. Professional authors' editors, medical writers, translators and commercial agents of editing agencies, in turn, should adhere to the ethical standards of writing and editing and transparently disclose their contributorship (25).
3. Indexers of the global bibliographic services such as Scopus and Web of Science should regularly evaluate their indexed sources and delist those violating established standards of scientific research and publication ethics and embarking on unethical (skewed) citation practices. Indexed journals that claim to have a model of peer review but accept most of its articles without external experts' quality checks, periodicals without enforced policies for preventing plagiarism and redundant publications, as well as those engaged in journal self-citations, coercive citations, and citation stacking can be candidates for delisting (26,27).

### DISCLOSURE

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conception, design: Gasparyan AY. Writing, revision: all authors. Final approval: all authors.

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