Ethical Peer Review
COPE: Promoting integrity in research and its publication

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Agenda

About COPE

Peer review
  – The why, what, and how of peer review
  – Guidelines for ethical peer review

Case-based workshop
About COPE
About COPE — publicationethics.org

• A neutral place (Forum) to discuss
• A website of freely available resources
• Database of cases
• Flowcharts
• Guidance/discussion documents
• Sample letters
• Codes of Conduct
• Best Practice guidelines
Why peer review?
Another Hansen masterwork … breathtakingly rich and panoramic … a creative and intellectual volcano

84% of researchers think without peer review there would be no control in scientific communication.

9 of 10 researchers feel that peer review improves the quality of their published paper.

Wiley RANO survey, 2013
Trust and authority in scholarly communications in the light of the digital transition, University of Tennessee and CIBER Research Ltd., 2013
Why peer review?

“an excellent way to keep up... a superb way to sharpen your own writing

Brian Lucey, professor of finance at Trinity College Dublin.
Peer review: how to get it right – 10 tips. Guardian.
What characterises peer review?
We experience peer review as authors, peer reviewers, editors, and readers

What characterises that experience for us?
On academic writing

“Turgid, soggy, wooden, bloated, clumsy, obscure, unpleasant to read, and impossible to understand.”

How do we approach peer review?
Peer review – 10 tips

1. Be professional
2. Be pleasant
3. Read the invite
4. Be helpful
5. Be scientific
6. Be timely
7. Be realistic
8. Be empathetic
9. Be open
10. Be organised

Guidelines for ethical peer review from COPE
Peer review in all its form plays an important role in ensuring the integrity of the scholarly record. The process depends to a large extent on trust, and requires that everyone involved behaves responsibly and ethically. Peer reviewers play a central and critical part in the peer-review process, but too often come to the role without any guidance and may be unaware of their ethical obligations. The COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers set out the basic principles and standards to which all peer reviewers should adhere during the peer-review process. It is hoped they will provide helpful guidance to researchers, be a reference for journals and editors in guiding their reviewers, and act as an educational resource for institutions in training their students and researchers.

**Basic principles to which peer reviewers should adhere**

Peer reviewers should:

- only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner
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-respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal

-not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person’s or organization’s advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others

-declare all potential conflicting interests, seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest

-not allow their reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by commercial considerations

-be objective and constructive in their reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libellous or derogatory personal comments

-acknowledge that peer review is largely a reciprocal endeavour and undertake to carry out their fair share of reviewing and in a timely manner

-provide journals with personal and professional information that is accurate and a true representation of their expertise

-recognize that impersonation of another individual during the review process is considered serious misconduct
Discuss

• Review when you have expertise and time
• Respect confidentiality
• Treat the information you see as privileged
• Declare your conflicts of interest
• Be objective in your review
• Be constructive in your review
• Give as much as you take
• Help journals to know your strengths
• Be honest if you play “pass the review”
Peer review problems: Fake peer review

Relatively recently discovered (2011)

Peer review scams and cartels (2014)

Fake email addresses and electronic submissions facilitated this activity

• Resulted in mass retractions by publishers in 2015
The manipulations may have been conducted by agencies offering language-editing and submission assistance.

Workshop

Read your case, discuss in small groups, and be ready to share what you think
To close, a story about a research hero
Finding the error became all-consuming; other projects languished.

Spare slides
“Think.Check.Submit” helps you confirm a journal’s credentials

Julie Walker, Author Aid, INASP. ALPSP YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k52bS9jXd0
15 million hours of peer review is wasted yearly.
COPE’s 18 Flowcharts (in 6 languages)

- How to respond to whistle blowers
- What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author’s idea or data
- What to do if you suspect plagiarism
- What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication
- Changes in Authorship
- Conflict of Interest
- What to do if you suspect an ethical problem
- What to do if you suspect fabricated data
What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published manuscript

1. Reader expresses suspicion of fabricated data
2. Thank reader and state your plans to investigate
3. Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer
4. Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations
5. If author replies
   - Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)
6. If no response
   - Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)
COPE's 18 flowcharts (in 6 languages)

Author replies

No response

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance, if necessary coordinating with co-authors' institutions

Contact author's institution requesting an investigation

Inform all authors you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Satisfactory explanation

Apologise to author
Publish correction if necessary (e.g. if an honest error has been detected)
Inform reader of outcome

Unsatisfactory answer/admits guilt

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

No or unsatisfactory response

Author(s) guilty of fabrication

Author(s) found not guilty

No response

Publish retraction

Apologise to author(s)

Publish expression of concern

Inform reader of outcome