

Committee on Publication Ethics launches ethical guidelines for peer reviewers

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Scholarly journals need to ensure that their peer reviewers act constructively, respect confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interests, according to new guidelines launched by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

The COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers set out the basic principles and standards that all reviewers should follow during the peer review process.

"Peer review plays an important role in ensuring the integrity of the scholarly record" stresses Dr Irene Hames, who coordinated the guidelines for COPE.

"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 that process.

"However, despite the fact that there are now an estimated 1.8 million articles published every year in about 28,000 peer-reviewed [scholarly journals](#), reviewers too often come to the role without any guidance and many may be unaware of their [ethical obligations](#).

"We hope that the new guidelines will provide much-needed guidance for researchers, be a reference for journals and editors when briefing their reviewers and act as an educational resource for institutions when they are training their students and researchers."

COPE's membership comprises leading international publishers, who are responsible for more than 7,600 of the world's top scholarly journals, including *Elsevier*, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, Taylor and Francis, Palgrave Macmillan, Wolters Kluwer and the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

They represent a wide range of academic fields in 80 countries, including medicine, life sciences, economics, psychology, chemistry, engineering, maths, education, environmental sciences, arts, humanities, law, geography and astronomy.

The support that COPE provides for editors and publishers includes:

- An eLearning programme, covering subjects such as fabrication, authorship and plagiarism
- A Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for [Journal Editors](#) and Publishers
- [Guidelines](#) on a wide range of ethical issues, such as retraction of articles, ethical editing and handling authorship disputes
- Flowcharts in various languages on how to handle problems such as fabricated data, disputed authorship and undisclosed conflicts of interest
- Discussion documents on plagiarism and responding to whistle blowers. Further documents on subjects such as data sharing are planned
- Regular international forums and seminars, including events in the UK, USA, Australia and Brazil.

More information: To view the new guidelines, please visit the COPE website at: publicationethics.org/files/Et...peer_reviewers_0.pdf

Provided by Committee on Publication Ethics

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