

These flowcharts and infographics are designed to help editors follow **COPE's Core practices** and implement its advice when faced with cases of suspected misconduct. For more information visit: https://cope.onl/core



Allegations of misconduct

- 2 Reviewer suspected to have appropriated an author's ideas or data
- 3 Responding to whistleblowers when concerns are raised directly
- 4 Responding to whistleblowers when concerns are raised via social media



Authorship and contributorship

- 5 <u>Changes in authorship</u> Addition of extra author – before publication
- 6 Changes in authorship
 Removal of author before publication
- Changes in authorship
 Addition of extra author after publication
- 8 Changes in authorship
 Removal of author after publication
- 9 Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript
- 10 How to spot authorship problems
- 11 How to recognise potential authorship problems



Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

- 12 <u>Undisclosed conflict of interest</u> in a submitted manuscript
- 13 Undisclosed conflict of interest in a published article



Data and reproducibility

- 14 Fabricated data in a submitted manuscript
- 15 Fabricated data in a published article
- 16 Image manipulation in a published article



Ethical oversight

17 Suspected ethical problem in a submitted manuscript



Intellectual property

- 18 Plagiarism in a submitted manuscript
- 19 Plagiarism in a published article



Journal management

- 20 General approach to publication ethics for the editorial office
- 21 Systematic manipulation of the publication process
- 22 Systematic manipulation of the publication process (Cont.)
- 23 Systematic manipulation of the publication process suspected before publication
- 24 Systematic manipulation of the publication process suspected after publication



Peer review processes

- 25 What to consider when asked to peer review a manuscript
- 26 Peer review manipulation suspected during the peer review process
- 27 <u>Peer review manipulation</u> <u>suspected after publication</u>
- 28 How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process



Post-publication discussions and corrections

- 29 Redundant (duplicate) publication in a submitted manuscript
- 30 Redundant (duplicate) publication in a published article

REVIEWER SUSPECTED TO HAVE APPROPRIATEL An Aithor's infas or nat

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Notes

- Reviewers' instructions should state that submitted material is confidential and may not be used in any way until after publication.
- *Cases with published papers may be handled as plagiarism (see flowchart 'Plagiarism in a published article', page 19).

OPEN REVIEW

(reviewer's identity is

disclosed to author)



(submitted manuscript and reviews)

If files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

ANONYMOUS REVIEW

(reviewer's identity is NOT

disclosed to author)

Author accuses actual reviewer of misconduct

Get as much documentary evidence as possible from author and other sources (eg, publication*, abstract, report of meeting, copy of slides, grant application): do not contact reviewer until you have assessed this



Review evidence (or get suitably qualified person to do this) and decide whether author's allegations are well founded

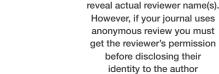
Not well founded

Appear well founded

Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation

DISCUSS WITH

xplaining



Consider removing reviewer

from review database during

investigation and inform

reviewer of your action

Do not forget people

who refused to review

Author accuses somebody who

was not asked to review the

article for your journal

Check for links between accused

person and named reviewer (eg, same

department, personal relationships)

Consider contacting actual reviewer(s) to comment on allegation and check they performed the review themselves/did not discuss the paper with others

EXPLAIN SITUATION TO AUTHOR

Decide whether you wish to

Satisfactory No or explanation unsatisfactory response

Contact reviewer's institution requesting an investigation

Reviewer If no response, exonerated contacting insti

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3-6 months



Consider reporting case in journal

Reviewer

found guilty

BioMed Central The Open Access Publisher

RESPONDING TO WHISTLEBLOWERS

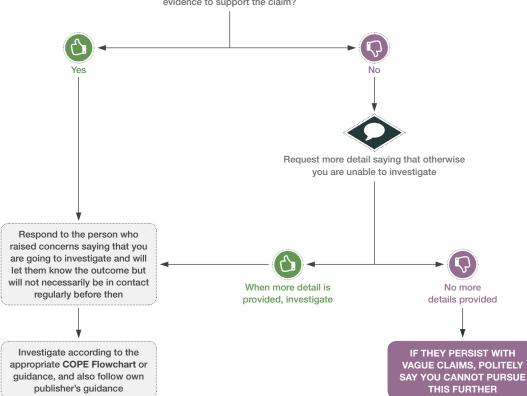
- The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges.
- Sometimes the whistleblower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to 'out' people who wish to be anonymous.

A PUBLISHED ARTICLE IS CRITICISED VIA DIRECT EMAIL TO THE EDITOR OR PUBLISHER. THIS COULD INCLUDE ANONYMOUS OR NOT ANONYMOUS CONCERNS ABOUT SOUNDNESS OF THE DATA OR ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM, FIGURE MANIPULATION, OR OTHER FORMS OF MISCONDUCT

> Let the publisher and the communications team know about any allegations. It is useful to establish an escalation procedure and agree a process for responding ahead of time



Do the allegations contain specific and detailed evidence to support the claim?



IF THERE IS AN OUTCOME TO YOUR **INVESTIGATION, SUCH AS A CORRECTION** OR RETRACTION, INFORM THE PERSON WHO ORIGINALLY RAISED THE CONCERN





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No

DON'T RESPOND,

BUT FLAG TO THE

PUBLISHER SO THEY

CAN DECIDE ON

THEIR APPROACH

Consider letting the authors

know and explain why you are

not responding at the moment.

Make sure the authors will be

able to access the comments

(eg, some authors are not able

to access Twitter or Google)

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RESPONDING TO WHISTLEBLOWER

- The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges.
- Sometimes the whistleblower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to 'out' people who wish to be anonymous.
- It is important to take the discussion away from the public domain; don't engage in specific discussions on social media.

A PUBLISHED ARTICLE IS CRITICISED ON SOCIAL MEDIA OR A POST-PUBLICATION PEER REVIEW SITE(S). THIS COULD INCLUDE ANONYMOUS OR NOT ANONYMOUS CONCERNS ABOUT SOUNDNESS OF THE DATA OR ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM, FIGURE MANIPULATION, OR OTHER FORMS OF MISCONDUCT

> Let the publisher and the communications team know about any allegations. It is useful to establish an escalation procedure and agree a process for responding ahead of time



Do the allegations contain specific and detailed evidence to support the claim?



Respond via the same social media, ideally within 24 hours, saying that you are going to investigate

Let the authors know via email that concerns were raised and ask them for an explanation. You should not generally add them to an exchange (eg, in a Twitter response). If the concerns were raised only about the research findings, in some instances the authors may wish to respond themselves

Investigate according to the appropriate COPE Flowchart or guidance, and also follow own publisher's guidance

It is appropriate to respond from a journal/publisher account rather than a personal Twitter account for legal and ethical reasons

RESPOND VIA THE

SAME SOCIAL MEDIA

TO SAY "THANK YOU.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO

RAISE A COMPLAINT

PLEASE CONTACT

[XYZ]." PROVIDE A

GENERIC CONTACT (EG.

CUSTOMER SERVICES),

WHO WILL BE ABLE

TO FORWARD THE

COMPLAINT TO THE

APPROPRIATE PERSON

IF THEY PERSIST WITH VAGUE CLAIMS, POLITELY SAY YOU CANNOT PURSUE THIS FURTHER AND DO NOT RESPOND TO ANY **FURTHER COMMENTS**

IF THERE IS AN OUTCOME TO YOUR INVESTIGATION, SUCH AS A CORRECTION OR RETRACTION, CONSIDER PUTTING INFORMATION ABOUT IT ON THE SAME SOCIAL MEDIA/SITE(S) WHERE THE **CONCERNS WERE ORIGINALLY RAISED**

It may not be appropriate for Twitter but useful on other sites. Post a link to the resolution on the journal site

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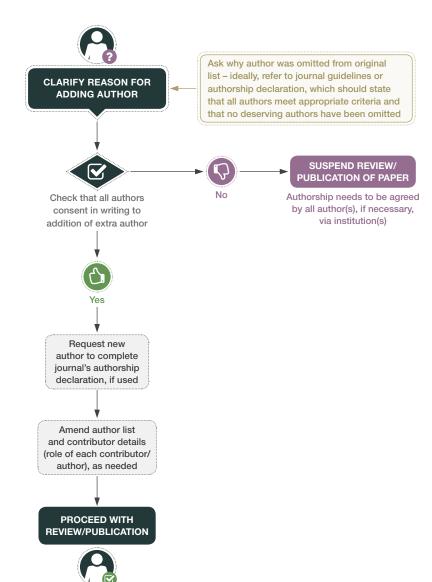
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Notes

- See also flowchart on 'Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript' (page 9) as requests for authorship changes may indicate presence of a ghost, guest, or gift author.
- Major changes in response to reviewer comments (eg, adding new data) might justify the inclusion of a new author.



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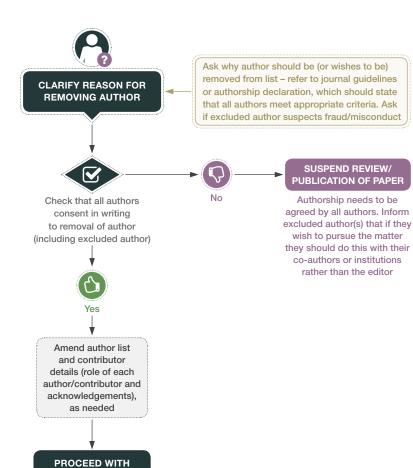
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CHANGES IN AUTHORSHIP PUBLICATIO 1

Notes

- See also flowchart on 'Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript' (page 9) as requests for authorship changes may indicate presence of a ghost, guest, or gift author.
- Most important to check with the author(s) whose name(s) is/are being removed from the paper and get their agreement in writing.



REVIEW/PUBLICATION

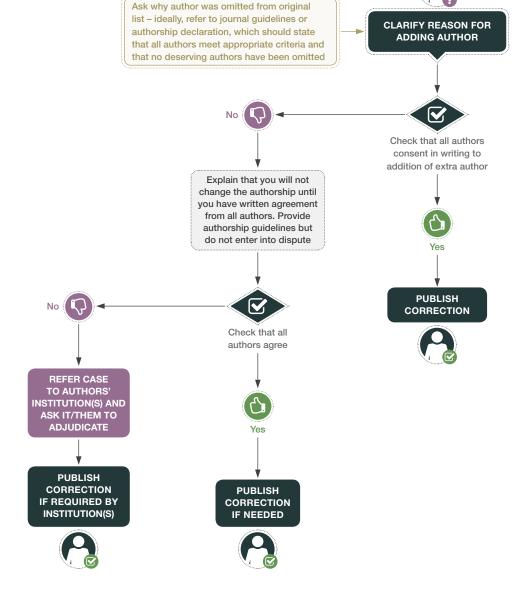


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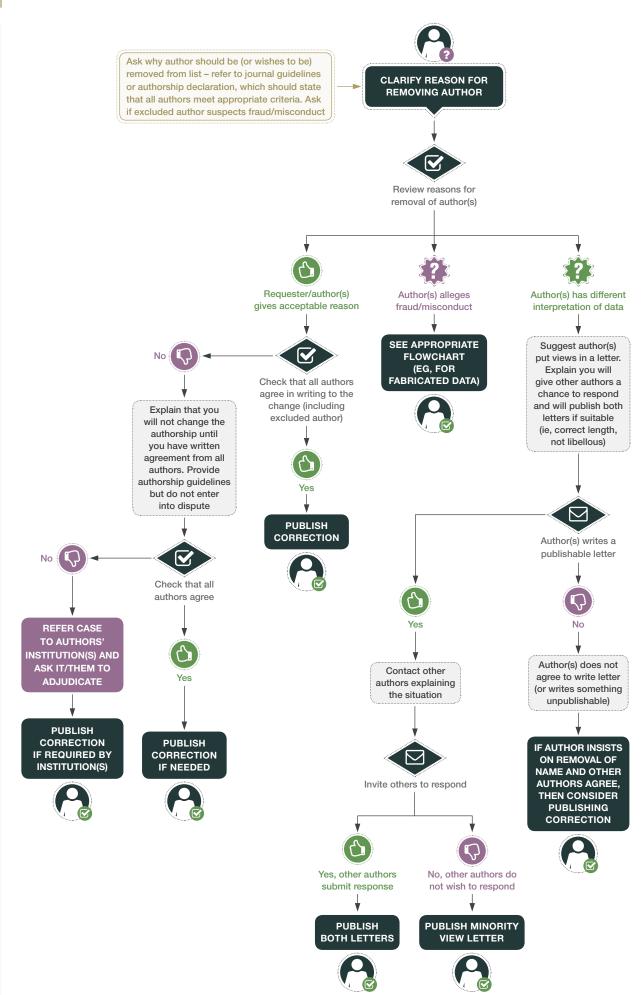
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See also COPE Infographic 'How to recognise potential authorship problems' SUSPEND PEER REVIEW IF SUSPICION IS (page 11). **RAISED ABOUT AUTHORSHIP** Review acknowledgement section and authorship declaration (if supplied) *Initial action will depend Send copy of journal's authorship policy** to **Including clear guidance/criteria for on journal's normal method corresponding author and request declaration authorship in journal instructions makes of collecting author/ that all qualify and no authors have been it easier to handle such issues omitted (if not obtained previously) contributor info and/or ***Marušić et al 1 have shown that the method of collecting such data (eg, free Request information (or further details) text or check boxes) can influence the of individuals' contributions*** response. Letting authors describe their own contributions probably results in the most truthful and informative answers Satisfactory Authorship role missing Listed author(s) (eg, contributor list does not include explanation does not meet remain/need anybody who analysed data authorship criteria of author list more information or prepared first draft) 'Guest' or 'gift' Try to contact authors 'Ghost' (Check Medline/Google author(s) identified author(s) identified for current affiliations/ emails) and ask about their role, whether any authors have been omitted, and whether they have any concerns Suggest missing author(s) Suggest guest/gift about authorship should be added to list author(s) should be removed/moved to acknowledgements section Get agreement for authorship change (in writing) from all authors. **PROCEED WITH** Letter should also clearly state the **REVIEW/PUBLICATION** journal's authorship policy and/or refer to published criteria (eg, ICMJE) and Review your journal's may express concern/disappointment instructions to contributors that these were not followed. and submission forms to For senior authors, consider ensure clear guidance and prevent future problem copying this letter to their head of department/person responsible for research governance

Reference

1. Marušić A, Bates T, Anić A, et al. How the structure of contribution disclosure statements affects validity of authorship: a randomised study in a general medical journal. Curr Med Res Opin 2006;22:1035-44. https://doi.org/10.1185/030079906x104885 🗗 Editors cannot police author or contributor listings for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors. The COPE Flowchart 'Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript' (page 9) suggests actions for these situations. The following points are designed to help editors be alert for inappropriate authorship and spot warning signs which may indicate problems.

Type of authorship problems

A ghost author is someone who is omitted from an authorship list despite qualifying for authorship. This is not necessarily the same as a ghost writer, since omitted authors often perform other roles, in particular data analysis. Gøtzsche et al¹ have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted from papers reporting industry funded trials. If a professional writer has been involved with a publication, it will depend on the authorship criteria being used whether they fulfil the criteria to be listed as an author. Using the ICMJE criteria for research papers, medical writers usually do not qualify as authors, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A guest or gift author is someone who is listed as an author despite not qualifying for authorship. Guests are generally people brought in to make the list look more impressive (despite having little or no involvement with the research or publication). Gift authorship often involves mutual professional enhancement (ie, including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs).



Signs that might indicate authorship problems

- Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments.
- Changes are made by somebody not on the author list (check Word document properties to see who made the changes but bear in mind there may be an innocent explanation for this, eg, using a shared computer, or a secretary making changes).
- 'Document properties' show the manuscript was drafted by someone not on the author list or properly acknowledged (but see above).
- Impossibly prolific author of review articles/opinion pieces (check also for redundant/overlapping publication; this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the author's name).
- Several similar review articles/editorials/opinion
 pieces have been published under different author names
 (this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using
 the article title or key words).
- Role missing from list of contributors (eg, it appears that none of the named authors were responsible for analysing the data or drafting the paper).
- Unfeasibly long or short author list (eg, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author).
- Industry funded study with no authors from sponsor company (this may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted); reviewing the protocol may help determine the role of employees.^{1,2}

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References

- 1. Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, et al. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. PLoS Med 2007;4:e19. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019 ♂
- 2. Wager E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. PLoS Med 2007;4:e34. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034 [7]

Signs that might indicate authorship problems

Industry funded study with no

This may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the original protocol may help determine the role of employees

Name on author list known to be

from unrelated research area This may indicate guest authorship

Unspecified role in acknowledgements

Individual thanked without a specific contribution

Unfeasibly long or short author list

For example, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author

Questionable roles of contributors

For example, it appears that no one drafted the paper or analysed the data

> A similarity check shows work derived from a thesis where the original author is not on the author list or acknowledged

Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments

> Manuscript was drafted or revised by someone not on the author list or acknowledged

Check Word document properties or tracking or comment functions, but bear in mind that there may be an innocent explanation for this

> Tracking in manuscript shows that authors have been added or removed

Bear in mind there may be legitimate reasons for this

Impossibly prolific author

For example, a head of department as senior author

Authorship changes without notification during revision stages

Several similar articles have been published under different author names or aliases

This may be detected by an online search or plagiarism check

Best practice to minimise authorship problems



Adopt policies that allow for transparency around who contributed to the submitted work and in what capacity

SUBMIT





Language quality in the

manuscript does not match

that of the cover letter

Bear in mind this may be

legitimate if author has used

language editing services

Recognisses to subject the subject of the subject o

problems

Facilitate awareness of emerging standards eg, ORCID and CRediT

ENCOURAGE





Check for unusual patterns of behaviour which may suggest authorship problems

BEHAVIOUR



Authorship policies:

Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship as well as processes for managing potential disputes.

For further details see: publicationethics.org/authorship

Relevant COPE Flowcharts and cases:

Flowchart: How to recognise potential authorship problems. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.22

Flowchart: Suspected ghost, guest, or gift authorship. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.18

Flowchart: Request for removal of author after publication. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.11

Flowchart: Systematic manipulation of the publication process. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.23

Case 17-15: Stolen article. https://cope.onl/case-stolen

Case 17-16: Authorship issues from disbanded consortium. https://cope.onl/case-authorship

Case 17-14: Withdrawal request by an author. https://cope.onl/case-withdraw

Further reading

COPE Discussion document on best practice in theses publishing. https://doi.org/10.24318/LQU1h9US

COPE webinar 2017: Standards in authorship.

https://cope.onl/issues

eLearning module on authorship (members only).

https://cope.onl/elearn-author

Siu-wai Leung. Promoting awareness of good authorship practice. https://cope.onl/good-practice

Marušić A, Bošnjak L, Jerončić A, et al. A systematic review of research on the meaning, ethics and practices of authorship across scholarly disciplines. PLoS ONE 2011;6:e23477.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0023477

Master Z, Bryn Williams-Jones B. Publication practices in multidisciplinary teams: a closer look at authorship assignment and ranking. https://cope.onl/author-assign

McNutt MK, Bradford M, Drazen JM, et al. Transparency in authors' contributions and responsibilities to promote integrity in scientific publication. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 2018;115:2557-60.

https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1715374115 [2]

Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, et al. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. PLoS Med 2007;4:e19. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019

Wager E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. PLoS Med 2007;4:e34.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034 27

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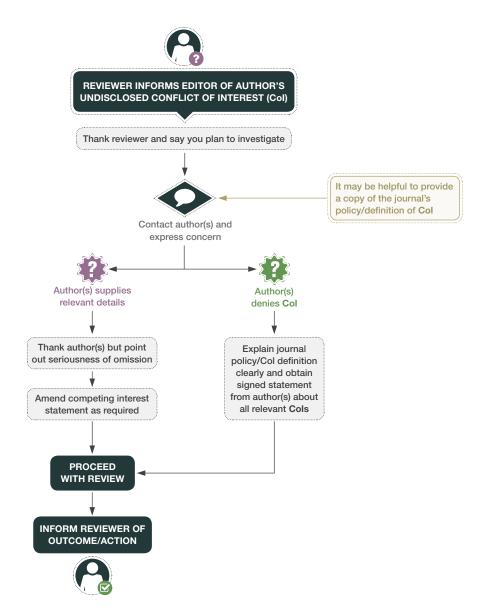
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Note

To avoid future problems, always get signed statement of Cols from all authors and reviewers before publication. Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of Col.



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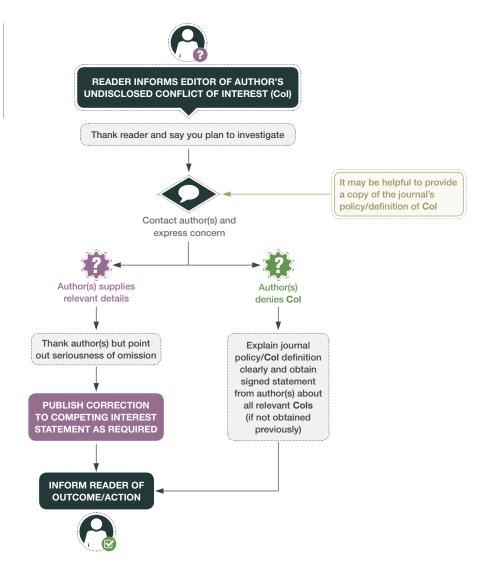
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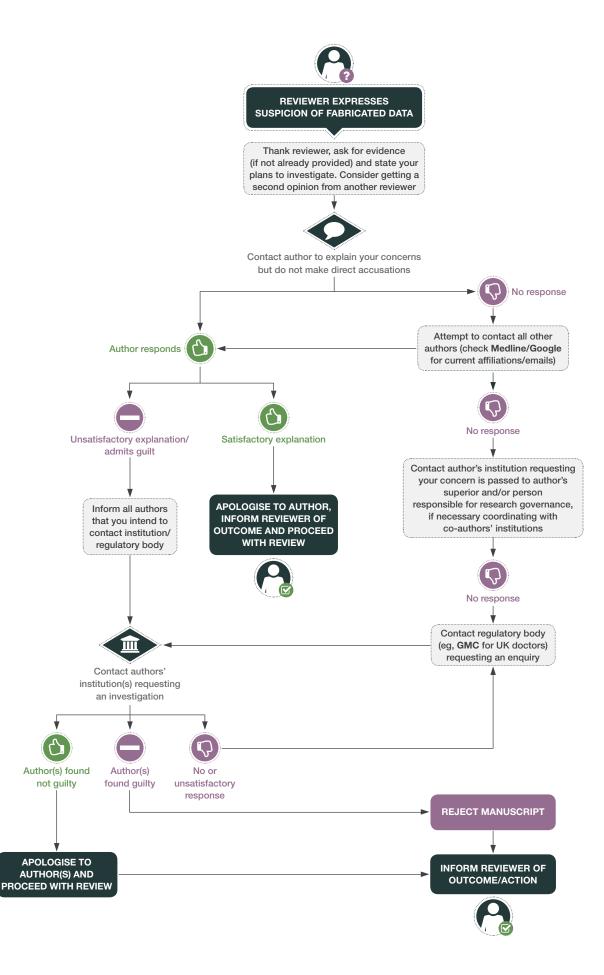
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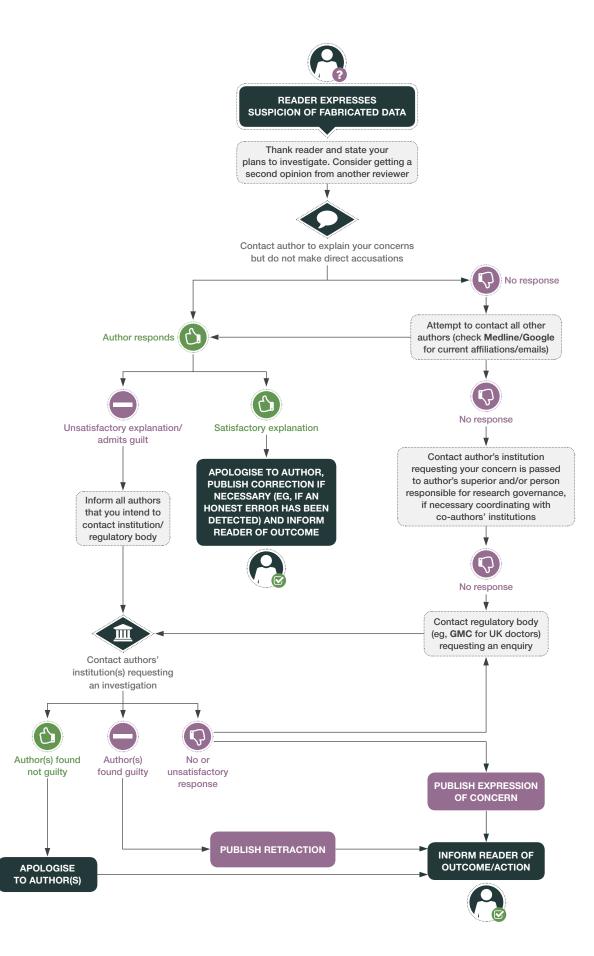


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Inform authors' superior

and/or person responsible

for research governance

at authors' institutions,

and inform authors

INFORM READER

OF OUTCOME

Note

This flowchart relates only to cases where concerns related to digital photographic images are raised (eg, duplication of parts within an image, or use of identical images to show different things). For wider concerns about potential data fabrication, please consult the flowchart 'Fabricated data in a

READER EXPRESSES SUSPICION OF IMAGE MANIPULATION Thank reader and state your plan to investigate. Consider getting a second opinion from another reviewer published article' (page 14). Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations No response Attempt to contact all co-authors (check online, Response eg, Medline or Google, for current affiliations/emails) Satisfactory Unsatisfactory Clear admission of image No response explanation answer manipulation by author APOLOGISE Consider whether you have sufficient evidence of image TO AUTHOR. manipulation to publish a retraction or a correction **PUBLISH** (eg, does zooming in show that parts of images are **CORRECTION IF** duplicated). Consider using software to analyse images NECESSARY (EG. PUBLISH A RETRACTION **IF AN HONEST** (OR CONSIDER A CORRECTION IF **ERROR HAS** THE MANIPULATION IS VERY MINOR **BEEN DETECTED** AND THE MAJORITY OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE ARTICLE REMAIN VALID), CONTACTING ALL THAT DOES NOT INVALIDATE Unclear/suspected Clear image CONCLUSIONS) **AUTHORS AND TELLING THEM** image manipulation manipulation WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO 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

Authors guilty of

image manipulation

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Journal of Cell Biology editorial policies on data integrity and plagiarism. http://b.link/jcb-integrity

Acuna DE, et al. Bioscience-scale automated detection of figure element reuse. bioRxiv February 23, 2018 https://doi.org/10.1101/269415 Butler D. Researchers have finally created a tool to spot duplicated images across thousands of papers. Nature 2018;555:18

https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-02421-3

Goodchild van Hilten L. At Harvard, developing software to spot misused images in science. http://b.link/elsevier-img

No response or

inconclusive reply

CONSIDER

CONTACTING AUTHORS'

INSTITUTION EVERY

3-6 MONTHS

If no resolution, consider

contacting the authorities

(eg, ORI in US, GMC in UK).

Consider publishing an

Expression of Concern

Authors not guilty of

image manipulation

APOLOGISE TO

AUTHOR. PUBLISH

CORRECTION IF

NECESSARY

(eg, if an honest error

has been detected that

does not invalidate

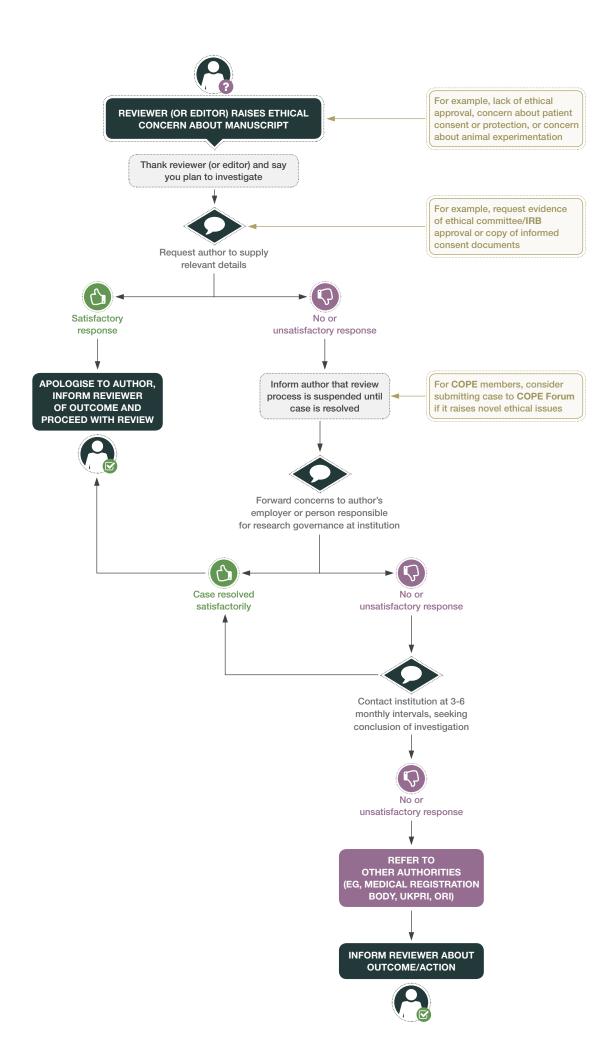
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The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on plagiarism.

REVIEWER INFORMS EDITOR ABOUT SUSPECTED PLAGIARISM Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate. Get full documentary evidence if not already provided Check degree of copying Clear plagiarism Redundancy Minor copying of short phrases only No problem (unattributed use of large (ie, copying from (eg. in discussion of research paper portions of text and/or data, author's own work) from non-native language speaker). presented as if they were No misattribution of data by the plagiarist) SEE Contact author in **FLOWCHART** neutral terms expressing **DISCUSS** ON REDUNDANCY disappointment/explaining WITH REVIEWER journal's position. Ask Contact corresponding author in AND PROCEED author to rephrase copied writing, ideally enclosing signed WITH REVIEW phrases or include as direct authorship statement (or cover letter) quotations, with references stating that submitted work is original/ the author's own and documentary evidence of plagiarism No response Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for

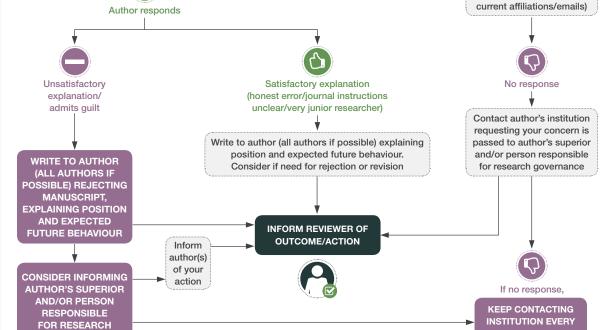
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GOVERNANCE AND/OR POTENTIAL VICTIMS



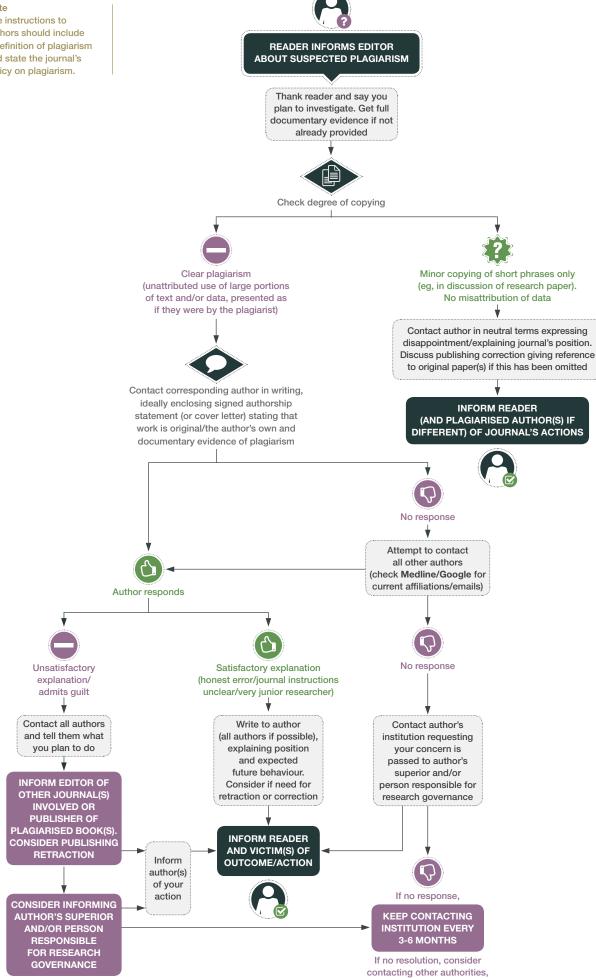
INSTITUTION EVERY 3-6 MONTHS

If no resolution, consider contacting other authorities,

(eg, ORI in US, GMC in UK)

Note

The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on plagiarism.



(eg, ORI in US, GMC in UK)

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Journals should consider developing a training programme for editors and editorial board members using the eLearning course for COPE members (https://cope.onl/elearn) or other resources.

The 'Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing' form part of the criteria COPE uses to evaluate publishers and journals, expecting them to adhere to and follow the spirit of the principles in all aspects of their publishing operation.

COPE has many resources to assist publishers and editors in making decisions about ethical issues in IS THE EDITORIAL OFFICE ORGANISED TO publication, including **COMPLY WITH COPE GUIDELINES?** guidelines, flowcharts, discussion documents, sample letters, eLearning modules, and an audit tool. Is the journal new or established? New journals just establishing Established journals and COPE member an editorial office journals wishing to evaluate current processes Begin with the COPE Core practices Begin with the and guidelines from the publisher 'COPE Journal audit' Develop guidelines for authors and Based on the results reviewers based on COPE Core practices of the audit, develop or on 'Authorship and contributorship' locate resources to and 'Peer review processes' address any issues found (eq. if authorship criteria are not clearly articulated Develop internal processes to support identification in policies, review of ethical concerns (eg, see COPE Core practices on resources such as the 'Allegations of misconduct', 'Conflicts of interest/Competing ICMJE authorship criteria interests', 'Data and reproducibility', 'Ethical oversight', and studies on journals' 'Intellectual property', 'Journal management', and instructions to authors: 'Post-publication discussions and corrections') see COPE Core practice on 'Authorship and contributorship') Develop guidelines for promptly responding to suspected ethical breaches by authors, reviewers, and editors: see COPE Core practice on 'Complaints and appeals' ORGANISATION OF THE EDITORIAL OFFICE **COMPLIES WITH COPE GUIDELINES**

Best practice to handle ethical issues

Ethical issues are often complex and the approach will vary depending on the specific problem and the resources of the journal. In general, COPE expects that member journals will adhere to these three basic principles to resolve ethical issues and cases of alleged misconduct:



Journal guidelines and processes must be transparent

Provide links to COPE Guidelines, flowcharts, and other materials (eg, ICMJE authorship and conflict of interest guidelines)

These items will clearly inform authors, reviewers, and readers of the processes of submission, review, publication, and grievances



Systems must be in place to promptly attend to and resolve all complaints related to publication ethics

Clearly identify contact information for the person responsible for handling allegations of misconduct

Establish editorial office guidelines about who responds to complaints (eq. in what manner, within what time frame, and what parameters require involvement of legal staff and the publisher). Some journals have an ethics committee: others rely on a sole editor to handle these issues

Know when and how to liaise with other editors and institutions1,2



Editorial staff must be committed to correcting the literature when needed and following through on requests from institutional investigations

Assure that resources such as COPE Retraction guidelines, flowcharts, and access to legal advice, if needed, are available to those tasked with resolving ethics issues



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Further reading

- 1. Yentis S, on behalf of COPE Council. Sharing of information among editors-in-chief regarding possible misconduct, version 1, March 2015. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.7
- 2. Wager E, Kleinert S, on behalf of COPE Council. Cooperation between research institutions and journals on research integrity cases: guidance from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), version 1, March 2012. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2018.1.3



Definition of systematic manipulation of the publication process

Systematic manipulation of the publication process is where an individual or a group of individuals have repeatedly used dishonest or fraudulent practices to:

- prevent or inappropriately influence the independent assessment of a piece of scholarly work by an independent peer.
- inappropriately attribute authorship of a piece of scholarly work.
- publish fabricated or plagiarised research.

Systematic manipulation is conducted with the goal of influencing the publication record and/or achieving financial gain, and involves more than one manuscript and possibly more than one journal.

Systematic manipulation of the publication process may raise concerns at different levels:

• Peer review manipulation. This type of manipulation can occur directly by manipulation or hacking of the submission system of the journal. It can also occur when authors are able to suggest peer reviewers and input contact email addresses for these peer reviewers on the submission system of the journal. The authors may suggest fabricated names or names of real experts, but the contact email addresses are falsified so that all correspondence with the suggested peer reviewers is directed back to the authors. The manipulators then submit positive peer review reports to ensure the manuscript is accepted for publication.

This type of manipulation may be carried out by a group of individuals who agree to act as false peer reviewers for each other's manuscripts, thereby guaranteeing favourable peer review reports and boosting the publication records of the group.

Third party editing agencies may carry out this type of manipulation by suggesting peer reviewers on the authors' behalf, for a fee, but supplying fabricated email addresses that they input on the submission system of the journal (although not necessarily with the authors' knowledge). They then also supply the favourable reviews, thereby guaranteeing manuscript acceptance for which they can charge a fee (Fig 1).

- Authorship for sale/papermills. Another possibility
 is initially inserting the name of an accomplished guest
 author, especially for single-blind and open review,
 and then replacing the name during revision or after
 editorial acceptance (Fig 2).
- Substitution of a manuscript. Sometimes a high quality manuscript is initially submitted (to ensure it passes peer review) and then a similar, but poorer quality manuscript (the authors' own manuscript) is substituted after editorial acceptance.

Fig 1. An example of peer review manipulation

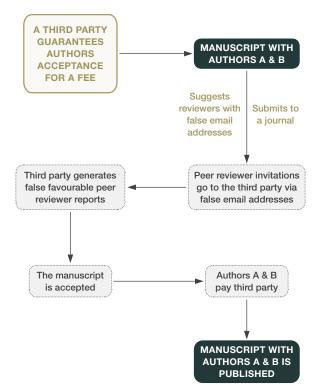
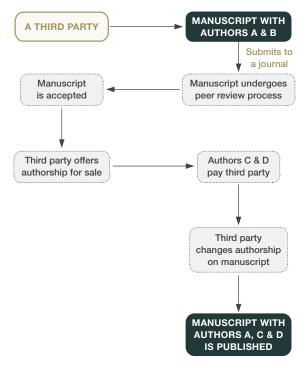


Fig 2. An example of authorship for sale



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MANAGEMENT

21

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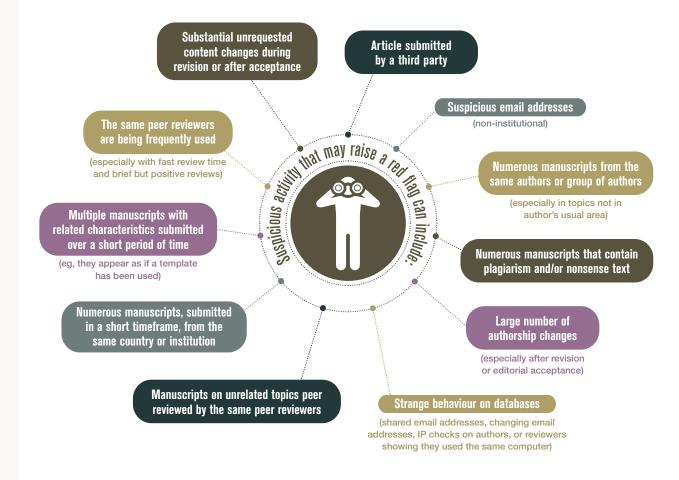
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Note: Peer review manipulation may occur in isolation and be instigated by authors on a small scale, for example, if a group of individuals are trying to boost their own publication records. Authorship for sale is likely to be accompanied by peer review manipulation because claiming a fee from the authors is dependent on acceptance for publication.

.....

Possible signs of systematic manipulation of the publication process



How to investigate and prevent further publication manipulation

On discovering a suspicious pattern, the first considerations would be:

- To determine the cause of the problem is it the authors, is it the reviewers?
- Search for other submissions and publications by the same authors.
- Check the peer reviewers of the suspicious manuscripts and published articles.
- Check the email addresses of peer reviewers of suspicious manuscripts and articles.
- Check whether there have been requests to change authorship or make major revisions after editorial acceptance.
- To determine whether there is a weakness in your submission process or manuscript handling system that can be addressed to prevent further manipulation.

Further investigation might include:

- Searching for computer IP addresses to determine whether all manuscripts were submitted via the same location.
- Cross publisher pattern checking via the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- Seeking advice from COPE.

Prevention steps may include the following:

- Using technology, such as adding flags to manuscripts or running searches on suspicious names or emails across all journals might make patterns become apparent.
- Providing information and training for editors to raise awareness of the types of manipulation that are occurring and what to look out for would be useful

JOURNAL MANAFEMENT

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COPE Publishers' Forum

The COPE Publishers' Forum is already used by publisher members of COPE to seek advice on unusual cases. It provides a confidential means of sharing information, such as patterns of behaviour, about publication process manipulation with other publishers to allow them to look for similar patterns in their systems. Over time, these shared patterns and findings could develop into a resource that all members could use to help with their investigations into suspicious activities.

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Notes

- *Please check guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-22) for definitions of systematic manipulation and information on how to spot, investigate, and prevent it.
- **COPE encourages its publisher members to share their findings on the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- ***If you suspect peer review manipulation see flowcharts on 'Peer review manipulation' (pages 26-27).



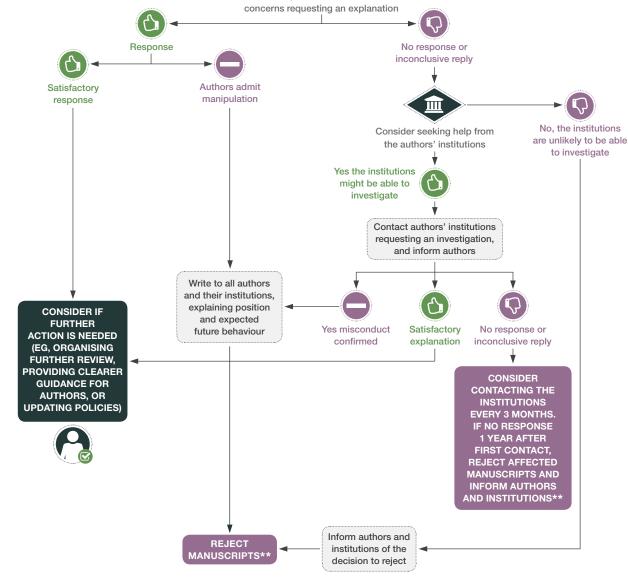
SUSPEND PEER REVIEW PROCESS
IF SUSPICION IS RAISED IN A SUBMITTED
MANUSCRIPT FOR SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION
OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS*

Get full documentary evidence and try to elucidate if there is clear evidence of systematic publication process manipulation (eg, share patterns of findings with other publishers via COPE)**



Contact the corresponding author, and co-authors if possible, with evidence and

Probably



Notes

- *Please check guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-22) for definitions of systematic manipulation and information on how to spot, investigate, and prevent it.
- **COPE encourages its publisher members to share their findings on the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- ***If you suspect peer review manipulation see flowcharts on 'Peer review manipulation' (pages 26-27).



SUSPICION IS RAISED IN A PUBLISHED
MANUSCRIPT FOR SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION
OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS*

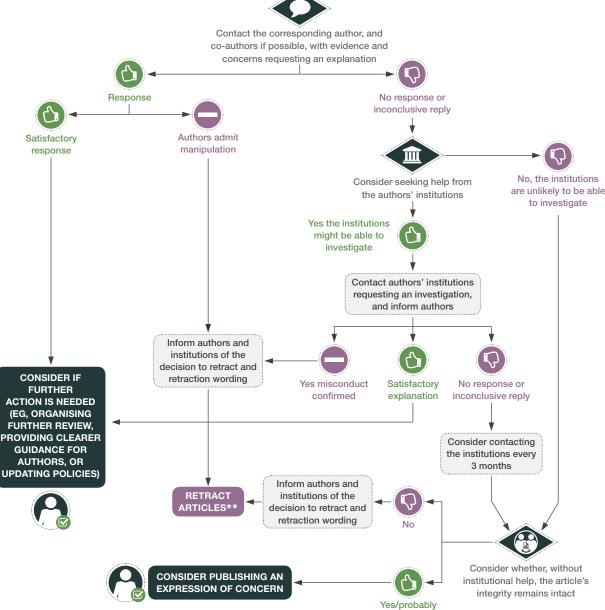
Get full documentary evidence and try to elucidate if there is clear evidence of systematic publication process manipulation (eg, share patterns of findings with other publishers via COPE)**



systematic*

Probably

systematic manipulation?



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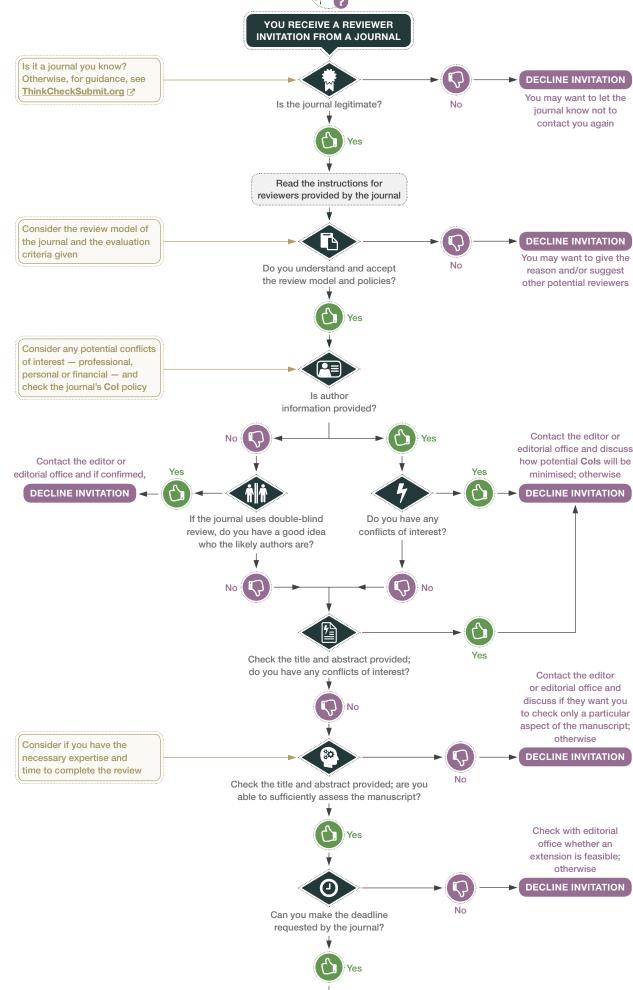
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WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN ASKED TO PEER REVIEW A MANUSGRIPI



ACCEPT THE INVITATION

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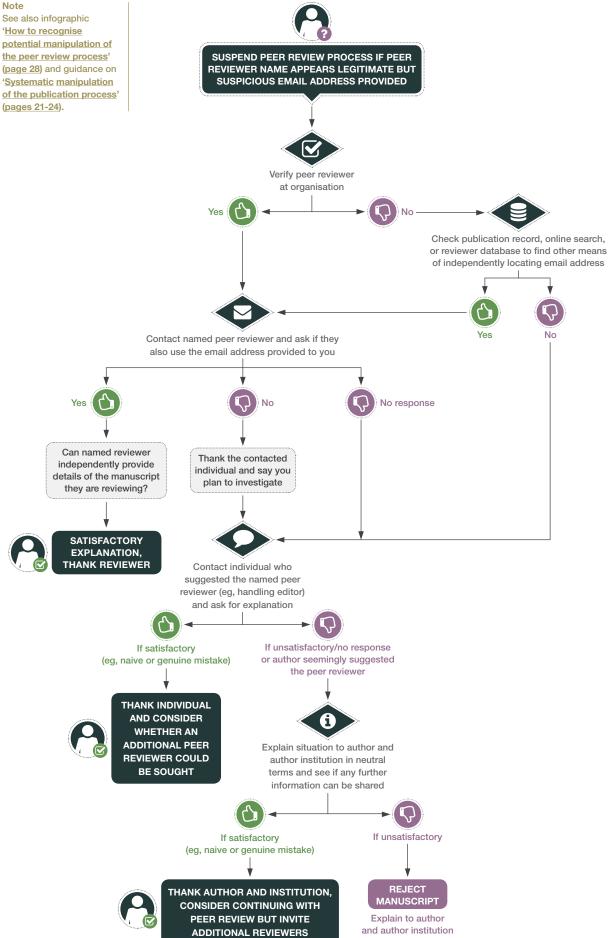
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Note

See also infographic 'How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process' (page 28) and guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process'



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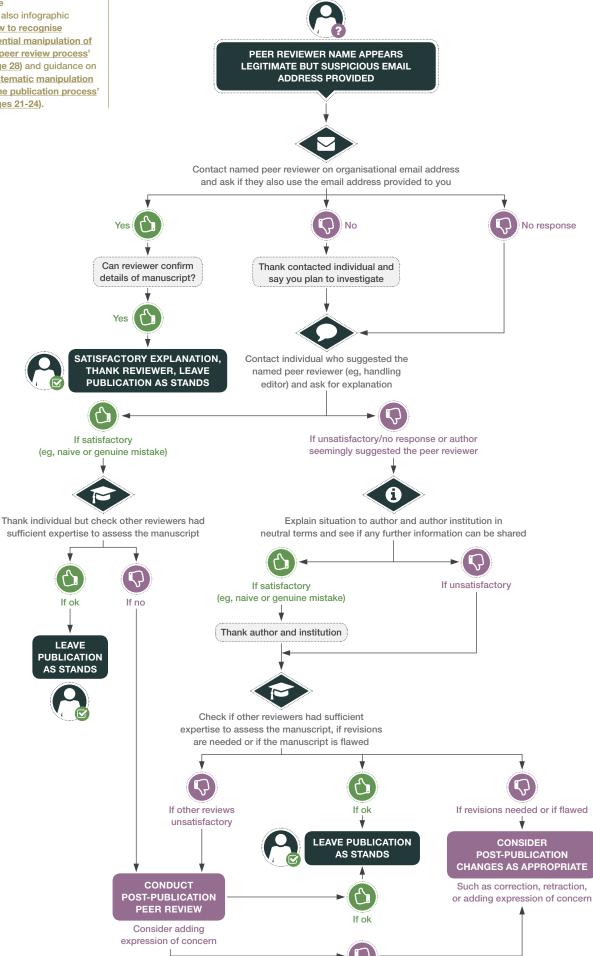
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Note

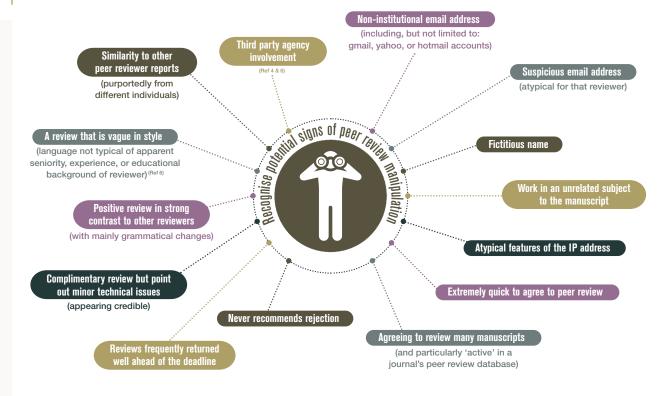
See also infographic 'How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process' (page 28) and guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-24).



If revisions needed or if flawed

Recognised features or patterns of questionable reviewer activity





Best practice to minimise peer review manipulation

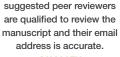




inviting peer reviewers.

VERIFY











Check for unusual patterns of behaviour which in combination may suggest peer review manipulation is occurring.

BEHAVIOUR



Peer reviewers may be suggested by:

- the Editor handling the manuscript.
- authors on submission of their manuscript to a journal.
- another reviewer who is unable to peer review the manuscript.

While there is an expectation that everyone involved in the process acts with integrity, 1 the peer review process can be susceptible to manipulation, 2-4 as discussed at COPE's 2016 North American Seminar.5

The features or patterns of activity shown opposite are suggested to help editors recognise potential signs of peer review manipulation. Often it is the occurrence of these features in combination that may indicate a potential issue, and they may only become apparent at later stages in the peer review or publishing process.

Relevant COPE cases:

Case 11-27: Author creates bogus email accounts for proposed reviewers. https://cope.onl/bogus-email

Case 12-12: Compromised peer review system in published papers. https://cope.onl/case-review

Case 12-16: Compromised peer review (unpublished). https://cope.onl/compromised

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https://cope.onl/statement

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- Moylan E. Inappropriate manipulation of peer review. BMC Blog 26 Mar 2015. http://b.link/bmc-blog2
 C*
- COPE North American Seminar 2016, 'Ethics in peer review'. https://cope.onl/ethics-seminar
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PEER REVIEW PROCESSES

Notes

- The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication.
- To help in future investigations, ask authors at submission stage to verify that their manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.
- During investigations, it may be helpful to request the institution's policy.
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original.

Redundancy may be detected by text-matching software (eg, Crossref Similarity Check)

REVIEWER INFORMS EDITOR ABOUT REDUNDANT PUBLICATION

> Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate. Get full documentary evidence if not already provided



Check extent and nature of overlap/redundancy



Major overlap/redundancy (ie, based on same data with identical or very similar findings and/or evidence that authors have sought to hide redundancy, for example, by changing title or author order, or not citing previous papers)

Minor overlap with some element of redundancy or legitimate overlap (eg, methods) or re-analysis (eg, subgroup analysis/extended follow-up/ discussion aimed at different audience)

No significant overlap

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work has not been published

Contact author in neutral terms expressing concern/explaining journal's position. Explain that secondary papers must refer to original. Request missing reference to original and/or remove overlapping material

INFORM REVIEWER OF DECISION AND PROCEED WITH **REVIEW**



elsewhere and documentary evidence of duplication **INFORM REVIEWER** OF OUTCOME/ACTION AND PROCEED WITH REVIEW

No response Attempt to contact all other authors

(check Medline/Google for current affiliations/emails) Author responds

Unsatisfactory explanation/ admits guilt

WRITE TO AUTHOR

(ALL AUTHORS IF

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/legitimate republication)

Write to author

(all authors if possible).

explaining position

and expected

future behaviour.

Consider if need for

rejection or revision

Inform author(s) of your

action

No response

INFORM REVIEWER OF

OUTCOME/ACTION

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person

responsible for research governance

If no response

KEEP CONTACTING INSTITUTION EVERY 3-6 MONTHS

POSSIBLE) REJECTING MANUSCRIPT, **EXPLAINING POSITION** AND EXPECTED **FUTURE BEHAVIOUR**

> CONSIDER INFORMING **AUTHOR'S SUPERIOR** AND/OR PERSON **RESPONSIBLE** FOR RESEARCH GOVERNANCE



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AND CORRECTIONS

Notes

- The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication.
- To help in future investigations, ask authors at submission stage to verify that their manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.
- ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original. Editors may consider publishing a correction (ie, the link to the original article) rather than a retraction/notice of duplicate publication in such cases.

READER INFORMS EDITOR ABOUT REDUNDANT PUBLICATION

> Thank reader and say you plan to investigate. Get full documentary evidence if not already provided



Check extent and nature of overlap/redundancy



Major overlap/redundancy (ie, based on same dataset with identical findings and/or evidence that authors have sought to hide redundancy, for example, by changing title or author order or not referring to previous papers)



Contact author in neutral terms expressing concern/explaining journal's

position. Explain that secondary

papers must refer to original. Discuss

publishing correction giving reference

to original paper.

INFORM READER OF DECISION AND LEAVE **PUBLICATION** AS IT STANDS

No significant

overlap





Author responds

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work has not been published elsewhere and documentary evidence of duplication

> No response Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for

> > Satisfactory explanation No response

INFORM READER OF

OUTCOME/ACTION

current affiliations/emails)

Where editor has reason to believe failure to refer to previous paper(s) was deliberate, consider informing author's superior or person responsible for research governance

INFORM READER OF



OUTCOME/ACTION



Unsatisfactory explanation/ admits quilt

INFORM EDITOR OF

OTHER JOURNAL INVOLVED. CONSIDER PUBLISHING RETRACTION. OR STATEMENT OF REDUNDANT **PUBLICATION**

IF OTHER JOURNAL

AGREES TO RETRACT

CONSIDER AUTHOR'S SUPERIOR AND/OR PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR RESEARCH

GOVERNANCE

Write to author (all authors if possible) explaining position and expected future behaviour. Consider if need for

retraction or correction

Inform

author(s) of your action

(honest error/legitimate

publication)

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance If no response

KEEP CONTACTING INSTITUTION EVERY 3-6 MONTHS

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POST-PUBLICATION DISCUSSIONS AND CORRECTIONS