

# Ethical Guidelines and Conflict of Interest

## Ethical Guidelines for Publication in Journals and Reviews†

Also see: [www.rsc.org/authorguidelines](http://www.rsc.org/authorguidelines)

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#### 1.0 Introduction

One of the foundations of the scientific profession is the acceptance by its members of a 'code of conduct' which outlines desired behaviour and obligations of members of the profession to each other and the public. Such a code of conduct seeks to maximise the benefits of science to society and the profession. The advancement of science requires the sharing of knowledge, even though this may sometimes forego any immediate personal advantage.

The publication of scientific research in journals is one of the fundamental ways in which the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) serves the chemical science communities. Central to this service are certain responsibilities that editors, authors and referees have to maintain the high ethical standard relating to the publication of manuscripts in the journals published by the RSC.

This document‡ outlines these responsibilities.

#### 2.0 Editors

Editors (including Editorial Board members and RSC Managing Editors) have the following responsibilities:

- To acknowledge receipt of submitted manuscripts within a few days of receipt and to ensure the efficient, fair and timely review process of submitted manuscripts.
- To ensure that submitted manuscripts are handled in a confidential manner, with no details being disclosed to anyone, with the exception of the referees, without the permission of the author, until a decision has been taken as to whether the manuscript is to be published.
- To make the final decision concerning acceptance or

rejection of a manuscript.

- To decide to accept or reject a manuscript for publication with reference only to the manuscript's importance, originality and clarity, and its relevance to the journal.
- To respect the intellectual independence of authors.
- To make known any conflicts of interest that might arise (see Appendix A.1). Specifically, in cases where an editor is an author of a submitted manuscript, the manuscript must be passed to another editor for independent peer review.
- Not to use for their own research, work reported in unpublished submitted articles.
- To consider the use of an author's suggested referees for their submitted article. However, the editor maintains the right to use referees of their own choice.
- Not to use referees which an author has requested are not to be consulted, unless the editor reasonably considers there to be a significant over-riding interest in so doing.
- To ensure the confidentiality of the names and other details of referees; adjudication and appeal referees may be informed of the names of prior referees, if appropriate.
- To respond to any suggestions of scientific misconduct, usually through consultation with the author. This may require the publication of a formal 'retraction' or correction.
- To deal fairly with an author's appeal against the rejection of a submitted manuscript.
- To comply with data protection regulations, as appropriate.

**NB** Only in the most extreme and unusual cases, and with the specific agreement of the Editorial Board and the Chair of the Journals Committee, may sanctions of limited duration be applied to an author.

#### 3.0 Authors

There is no universally agreed definition of authorship. As a minimum, authors should take responsibility for a particular section of the study. The award of authorship should balance intellectual contributions to the conception, design, analysis and writing of the study against the collection of data and other routine work. If there is no task that can reasonably be attributed to a particular individual, then that individual should not be credited with authorship. All authors must take public responsibility for the content of their paper. The multidisciplinary nature of much research can make this difficult, but this may be resolved by the disclosure of individual contributions.

Authors have the following responsibilities:

- To gather and interpret data in an honest way. Editors,

† For more detailed information on this topic, as well as links to useful websites and software resources, see: <http://www.rsc.org/resource>.

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referees, readers and publishers have the right to assume that submitted (and published) manuscripts do not contain scientific dishonesty and/or fraud comprising among others fictitious data, plagiarised material, reference omissions, false priority statements, ‘hidden’ multiple publication of the same data and incorrect authorship. Authors must not breach any copyright.

- To present a concise and accurate report of their research and an objective discussion of its significance.
- To give due recognition to published work relating to their submitted manuscript by way of correct reference and citation. All sources should be disclosed, and if a significant amount of other people’s material is to be used, permission must be sought by the author in accordance with copyright law.
- (a) To avoid undue fragmentation of their work into multiple manuscripts. Editors have the right to reject submitted articles on the grounds of undue fragmentation. In particular, a piece of work should not be split into a number of manuscripts for publication as Communications. (b) Not to engage in redundant publication, which occurs when two or more papers, without full cross reference, share the same hypothesis, data, discussion points, or conclusions. Previous publication of an abstract or preprint of the proceedings of meetings does not preclude subsequent submission for publication, but full disclosure should be made at the time of submission. Re-publication of a paper in another language is acceptable, provided that there is full and prominent disclosure of its original source at the time of submission.
- To consider publishing related manuscripts in the same journal or a small group of journals, as this can be of benefit to readers.
- To inform the editor of related manuscripts under consideration for publication by the same author in any journal, on submission of their current manuscript. Authors may be requested to provide copies of these related manuscripts, and details of their present status.
- To ensure that a manuscript is submitted for publication in only one journal at a time. It is not acceptable for an author to submit a manuscript (or manuscripts describing essentially the same matter) to more than one journal at a time. A manuscript which is a full paper report of a published communication may be submitted for publication; however the author has the responsibility to inform the editor of the previously published communication.
- To ensure that their submitted articles contain no personal criticism of other scientists. Criticism of the work of another scientist may, however, be justified. An article may not contain any defamatory or otherwise actionable material.
- To give due acknowledgement to all workers contributing to the work. Those who have contributed significantly to the research should be listed as co-authors. On submission of the manuscript, the corresponding author attests to the fact that those named as co-authors have agreed to its submission for publication and accepts the responsibility for having properly included all (and only) co-authors. If there are more than ten co-authors on the manuscript the corresponding author should provide a statement to specify the contribution of each co-author. The corresponding author signs a copyright licence on behalf of all the authors.
- To declare all sources of funding for the work in the manuscript, and also to declare any conflict of interest (see Appendix A.1).
- To identify clearly in the manuscript any unusual hazards inherent in the use of chemicals, procedures or equipment in the investigation.

- In cases where a study involves the use of live animals or human subjects, to include in the Methods/Experimental section of the manuscript a statement that all experiments were performed in compliance with the relevant laws and institutional guidelines, and to state the institutional committee(s) that have approved the experiments. To include a statement that informed consent was obtained for any experimentation with human subjects. Referees may be asked to comment specifically on any cases in which concerns arise.

## 4.0 Referees

Referees have the following responsibilities:

- To treat the manuscript as confidential. The manuscript (or its existence) should not be shown to, disclosed to, or discussed with others, except in special cases, where specific scientific advice may be sought; in that event the editor must be informed and the identities of those consulted disclosed.
- To return/destroy/erase the manuscript and to inform the editor should they be unqualified to review the manuscript, or lack the time to review the manuscript, without undue delay.
- To judge the manuscript objectively and in a timely fashion. Referees should not make personal criticism in their reviews.
- To return the manuscript without review to the editor if there is a conflict of interest (see Appendix A.1). Specifically, Referees should not review manuscripts authored or co-authored by a person with whom the referee has a close personal or professional relationship, if this relationship could be reasonably thought to bias the review.
- To explain and support their judgements so that editors and authors may understand the basis of their comments, and to provide reference to published work, where appropriate.
- To inform the editor of any similarity between the submitted manuscript and another either published or under consideration by another journal.
- To ensure that all unpublished data, information, interpretation and discussion in a submitted article remain confidential and not to use reported work in unpublished, submitted articles for their own research.
- To alert the editor if a manuscript contains plagiarised material or falsified data.
- Not to retain or copy the submitted manuscript in any form; to comply with data protection regulations, as appropriate.
- To make known any conflicts of interest that might arise (see Appendix A.1).

## A.0 Appendix

### A.1 Declaration of ‘Conflict of interest’

**A.1.1 Guidance for editors, authors and referees of Journals and Reviews.** § The Managing Editor of the RSC Journal concerned should be informed of any significant ¶ conflict of interest that editors, authors or referees may have, in order to determine if any action may be appropriate (such as adding a declaration of an author’s conflict of interest to a published piece, or disqualifying a referee). Conflicts of interest are almost inevitable and it is not intended to attempt to eliminate these.

- **Financial.** Editors, authors and referees of an article, editorial *etc.*, should inform the Managing Editor of any significant financial interest—recent, present or anticipated—in any organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of the piece (*e.g.* employment by such an organisation; funds for research; funds for a member of staff; fees for consulting; stock or share holdings; patent interests). If you have such an interest, you may have a conflict of interest, which, in the spirit of openness, should be declared to the Managing Editor.
- **Other interests.** An editor, author or referee may wish to disclose to the Managing Editor another conflict of interest that would be embarrassing if it became generally known (*e.g.* an academic link or rivalry or a close relationship with, or a strong antipathy to, a person whose interests may be affected by publication of an article, editorial).

§ For a description and discussion of some leading journals’ policies on conflicts of interest see: F. van Kolfschooten, “Conflicts of interest: Can you believe what you read?”, *Nature*, 28 March 2002, vol. 416, pp. 360–363; <http://www.nature.com>; DOI: 10.1038/416360a.

¶ Significance may be judged by considering whether an undeclared conflict of interest could be embarrassing were it to become publicly known after the fact.