



CODE OF CONDUCT FOR JOURNAL EDITORS

Note: This document is based on the COPE guidelines from 1999, COPE Code of Conduct from 2003, the COPE Best Practice Guidelines from 2007, COPE Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors from 2011, COPE Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing from 2014, Recommendations on Publication Ethics Policies of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME).

Code of conduct for journal editors is designed to provide a set of minimum standards which should be followed by the editors of scientific publications and journals.

1. General duties and responsibilities of an editor

Editors are responsible for all the contents published in their journals, which means that they should strive to meet the needs of readers and authors, seek to constantly improve their journal, have well-defined editorial processes that ensure the quality of published material and promote freedom of expression. The editor should refrain from considering manuscripts when there is a conflict of interest because of competition, cooperation and other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies or institutions associated with the manuscript. Editors should ensure the integrity of academic records and publish corrections, clarifications, retractions or apologies whenever needed.

The editor should actively seek the opinions of authors, readers, reviewers and members of the editorial board of the possible ways of improving the journal. The editor's duty is to support initiatives that will reduce publication and academic misconduct and to introduce and educate researchers about the provisions of publication ethics. The policy of the journal, if necessary, should be modified taking into account new technical and scientific knowledge about peer review, journal editing and publishing, and the effects of policy on the behaviour of the journal authors and reviewers. The editor needs to convince the owners and/or publishers of the journal of the need to ensure the necessary resources, including the occasional involvement of other professionals (e.g. designers, lawyers, etc.). Editors should systematically assess the impact of their guidelines on authors and reviewers, and revise them if necessary, encouraging responsible behaviour and discouraging misconduct.

2. Editor's relations with readers

Readers should be informed about who has funded research or other scientific engagement and whether funders had any role in the research and publication, and if so, what kind. In this sense, the editors should ensure that all published research papers are reviewed by qualified reviewers (including statistical reviews if necessary) and that non-reviewed parts of the journal are clearly marked. Editors should systematically adopt processes that promote accuracy, completeness and clarity of research reporting, including technical editing and the use of appropriate guidelines and regulations (e.g. MIAME, CONSORT), especially when it comes to research in biomedicine and related areas. Editorial boards should inform the readers about authorship and contributorship, transparently listing contributions and discouraging misconduct, such as the appearance of authors who have significantly contributed to the work but are not listed as authors (ghost authors) or the authors who listed, but did not contribute to the work to an extent sufficient for authorship (guest authors). Editorial boards should also inform readers about the



steps that have been taken so that the published works of people related to the journal issuance or of the members of the editorial board were objectively and impartially assessed.

3. Editor's relations with authors

Editor's decisions on acceptance or rejection of an article should be based on the importance of the article, originality and clarity, validity and relevance of the research for the area which the journal covers, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity, nationality or political beliefs of the author. Editors must ensure appropriate reviewers of submitted papers, i.e., individuals who are able to assess the article and are not in conflict of interest. In doing so, the editors should take into account the author's request for exemption of certain persons, if it is clearly explained and applicable. A detailed description of the review process should be available to authors, and editors should be prepared to justify any deviation from it. Editors may not change decisions made on acceptance or rejection of articles, except in the case of serious problems associated with the submitted article. The journal should establish mechanisms for authors to complain on the decision of the editor.

The instructions for authors should contain clear information on what is expected from them by editors. These instructions should be updated regularly, and contain the link to the guidelines that are followed by editors (e.g. COPE).

Editors should provide guidance on the criteria of authorship, as well as on the criteria for collaborators, following the standards to be applied within the scientific field (e.g. ICMJE, Responsible research publication: international standards for authors, etc.). In addition to the authors or collaborators, the information about the potential conflict of interest should be clearly stated.

In case of suspected misconduct or disputed authorship, editors are recommended to consult the procedures listed in the COPE flowcharts available on the MSES site (<http://public.mzos.hr/fgs.axd?id=14128>).

Editors will in the shortest possible time from the receipt of the article, if the latter is thematically linked to the journal, written in a style that scientific research requires and technical adequately prepared, send for review. Typically, the time required from sending the article to the receipt of reviews is three to four months. The average time needed to publish the article depends on several factors, but mainly is about six to eight months.

The date of the application and acceptance of the article should be published together with the article itself.

4. Editor's relations with reviewers

Editors should provide clear guidelines for reviewers, stating all that is expected from reviewers, including confidential material submitted for review. Before their consent, reviewers should declare their potential conflicts of interest. Privileged information or ideas obtained during the review process shall be kept confidential and should not be used for personal gain. Editors should ensure the protection of the identity of the reviewer, except in the case of open review, during which the reviewer selects whether his /her identity will be disclosed or not.

Editor selects two or more persons who have appropriate professional competence for evaluating manuscripts, gives them clear guidelines for the implementation of the review process and is responsible for its objectivity and timeliness. Instructions for reviewers must be regularly updated and should include links to relevant documents (e.g. COPE recommendations, etc.). It is not recommended that the instructions for reviewers contain only the forms in which the reviewers write their own review of the manuscript and suggest its



classification. It is recommended that the instructions contain detailed descriptions of the journal criteria for publishing articles. If a reviewer expected to complete the form, in the instructions for reviewers each element of the form should be explained, including clear criteria for the classification of articles applied by the journal.

Reviewers are encouraged to comment on various ethical issues related to the possibility of research misconduct raised by submissions (e.g. unethical research design, lack of patient consent to be research subjects, protection of research subjects, for example, animals, improper handling and presentation of research data, etc.). Reviewers are encouraged to comment on the originality of submissions and the caution related to redundant publication or plagiarism. Editorial reviewers can provide the tools for the detection of related publications (e.g. links to cited literature and results of bibliographic search).

Reviewer comments are sent to the authors in its entirety, unless they contain derogatory or offensive remarks.

Editors in different ways acknowledge and reveal the contribution of reviewers and encourage academic and scientific institutions to respect of the activities of reviewers and to recognize reviews as an important part of academic achievement. Editors develop and maintain a database of reviewers that is regularly updated, adding new reviewers and removing those who systematically produce poor quality or late reviews. In this way, editors monitor the work of reviewers and quality of review, and take all steps to ensure high quality of the review process. Editors use different methods to identify new reviewers, for example, suggestions of authors or by searching bibliographic databases, with the aim that the reviewer corpus represents the community of the scientific field and journal well.

Editors should take reasonable measures in the event of ethical complaints submitted in relation to the manuscript or article. These measures refer to contacting the author of the manuscript or article and stating complaints or claims with due diligence, and if there is no response to the complaint, they may include further recourse to competent institutions and academia, as well as publication of a correction, recall, expressing concern or other appropriate response. Every reported case of unethical behaviour must be investigated, even if detected several years after the publication. In case of doubt of reviewer misconduct, editors are recommended to follow the procedures from the COPE flowcharts available on MSES site (<http://public.mzos.hr/fgs.axd?id=14128>).

5. Relations of editor with editorial board members

Editors should ensure that new members of the editorial board receive instructions about their expected work and report regularly new policies and changes to the existing members. The journal should have a policy of handling the work of editors to ensure impartial peer-review. Suitably qualified members of the editorial board who can actively contribute to the journal development and good management should be systematically identified. Members of the editorial board must have access to clear guidance about their expected functions and duties, which may include the role of journal ambassador, supporting and promoting of the journal, pre-review and review of manuscripts, searching for the best authors and best works, actively encouraging submission of manuscripts, reviewing manuscripts, accepting to write editorials, reviews and comments on articles in their field of scientific specialization, participation and contribution to the meetings of the editorial board. At least once a year, members of the editorial board should be invited to the assessment of journal management, submission of comments and suggestions to improve the journal or the work of the editorial board and inform them of any changes in the journal policy as well as future challenges.



6. Relations of editor with journal owner/publisher

Relations of an editor with publishers and owners is often complex, but should be firmly based on the principle of editorial independence. Editors should make decisions about the works to be published on the basis of quality and appropriateness for the journal and without interference from the owner/publisher. Editors should have the agreement(s) governing their relations with the journal owner and /or publisher which define mechanisms to solve possible disputes between them. Editors should communicate regularly with the journal owner/publisher.

7. Editing and peer-review process

Editors should ensure a fair, impartial and timely review and ensure the confidentiality of submissions during the peer assessment and publication. To that end, editors and reviewers will be permanently trained on the latest guidelines, recommendations and examples of best practice in review procedures and journal management and systematically monitor research in the field of scientific publishing and development of technology. Methods of peer-review that are most appropriate for the journal and the scientific community it serves it shall be adopted, taking into account the existing practices of the more advanced environments whose application could improve the existing peer-review. Problem cases will be reported to COPE, especially in cases where they are not included in the COPE flowcharts or an incidence of new scientific misconduct is suspected.

8. Quality assurance

Editors must take all reasonable steps to ensure the quality of published material, taking into account the fact that the journal and its parts have different goals and standards. Editors should have systems for the detection of false data (e.g. manipulated photographs or plagiarised text) at their disposal, which can be used regularly or in case of doubt. Journal style should be based on factors that improve quality reporting (e.g. adoption of structured abstracts, standard style of referencing-established in the international scientific community, the use of guidelines such as CONSORT, etc.), rather than on aesthetic or personal preferences.

9. Protection of individual data

Editors are required to comply with the Act on Personal Data Protection in force in the Republic of Croatia. The confidentiality of information obtained during the research or professional interactions (e.g. between doctors and patients, researchers and respondents in the survey, etc.) always has to be protected. Therefore, it is almost always necessary to obtain a written consent for publishing by persons that could identify themselves or be identified by others (e.g. case studies or photos). Disclosure of personal information without the express consent may be permitted only when the public interest transcends any damage, if it is impossible to get approval and, if is not likely that a reasonable individual would oppose to its publication. The policy of publication of personal data should be publicly disclosed and clearly explained to the authors. It should be noted that consent to participate in research and undergo treatment is not the same as consent to the disclosure of personal information, photos or quotations.

10. Encouraging academic integrity (for research including people or animals)

Editors should try to ensure that the research is conducted and published in accordance with the relevant international standards and guidelines (for example, the Declaration of Helsinki for clinical research, AERA and BERA guidelines for research in the field of education, etc.). Editors should seek guarantees that all research was approved by the appropriate bodies (e.g.



research ethics committee), where they exist. However, editors should take into account that such approval does not guarantee the ethics of research.

If editors have concerns or they need additional explanations, they should ask for evidence of ethical approval for the research and ask the authors questions about the ethical aspects of the research (such as, how the participants in the survey were asked for the consent and how it was obtained, or what methods to reduce animal suffering were applied). It is necessary to ensure that the reports on clinical trials refer to compliance with the Helsinki Declaration and other relevant international or national guidelines for the protection of research participants. It may be very useful to appoint an ethical adviser for the journal, who the editors could contact in specific cases, and who would periodically review regulations, instructions and guidelines of the journal.

11. Procedures in cases of scientific misconduct

In case the editors suspect scientific misconduct or somebody has warned them about it, they have an obligation to act, regardless of the fact whether the work has been published or not. Editors cannot simply reject the manuscripts that raise concerns or doubts about the possible scientific misconduct. Ethics require the investigation of such cases, and it is recommended to follow the COPE flowcharts, whenever possible and regardless of the complexity of the procedure and the effort. Editors should primarily seek answers from those whose behaviour raises concerns. If they are not satisfied with the answer, they should refer the matter to the relevant employer, institution or competent body, with the aim to investigate the alleged scientific misconduct in depth.

12. Ensuring the protection of academic records

Erroneous, inaccurate or misleading statements must be corrected immediately, with due prominence. Editors should follow international guidelines for retraction, e.g. COPE guidelines. Editors should take steps to reduce the possibility of publishing a recurring publication and presentation of anonymous clinical trials. It is also necessary to ensure the safe storage of published materials (e.g. storage in national and international repositories). It is very important to ensure that the articles are freely available to their authors.

13. Intellectual property

When it comes to issues of intellectual property editors need to be careful and cooperate with the publisher for considering potential violations of the laws and conventions of intellectual property. In doing so, the application of tools to detect plagiarism in received manuscripts (e.g. software that detects the texts that are similar) can be helpful, either as part of the regular editorial process or when suspicions are raised. Editors need to support the authors whose copyright has been infringed, or who were victims of plagiarism. In cooperation with the publisher editors should defend the rights of authors and prosecute offenders.

14. Stimulating discussion

Editors should encourage and be willing to consider persuasive criticism of an article, and the author of the criticized material should be given a chance to respond. By no means should the publication of research reporting negative results be excluded, and the research that questions the results already published research should be considered.



15. Complaints

Editors should immediately respond to complaints and ensure the procedure where dissatisfied applicants can forward their complaints. This mechanism should be clearly described in the documents of the journal and should include information on how the unresolved issues are forwarded to COPE.

It is good that the editors in processing complaints follow the procedures specified in COPE flowcharts.

16. Commercial considerations

The journal should not allow the market interests influence the editorial board decisions. Editors should develop possible rules of advertising in relation to the content of the journal and in relation to the publication of sponsored supplements (e.g. conference proceedings, etc.). For this purpose, it is good to publish journal income sources, including sponsored supplements, fees for additional pages and the like. It is also necessary that sponsored supplements undergo the same process of peer-review as well as other articles in the journal. Accepting the publication of sponsored supplements should be based on academic quality and the interest of the reader, and the decision can in no way be the result of commercial considerations. Preprints should be published as they appear in the journal, except where it is necessary to include the correction, which must be clearly stated.

17. Conflict of interest

Editors should have developed management systems for their own conflict of interest, as well as for editorial staff, authors, reviewers and members of the editorial board. Journals should have a declared procedure for handling manuscripts by editors, staff or members of the editorial board in order to ensure an impartial process of peer-review. For this purpose, it is recommended to publish a list of relevant interests (financial, academic and other) of all editorial staff and members the editorial board, which should be updated at least once a year.