International Federation of Automatic Control

IFAC

IFAC Strategic Planning Process

Suggestions for

IFAC Publication Ethics Guidelines

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1 Introduction

This document presents the perspective of the International Federation of Automatic Control (IFAC) on ethical guidelines for editors, reviewers, and authors. The purpose of these guidelines is to define generally agreed upon rules and minimal standards for the proper scientific conduct with respect to scholarly publications represented by IFAC.

There are four fundamental ethical issues, as identified in [1, 2], which may occur in the publishing process. The first issue is undeclared conflicts of interest. For authors, such conflicts may arise regarding the conduct or the interpretation of their work. For reviewers, conflicts of interest may threaten the unbiased and objective evaluation of the work. The second issue is disputed authorship, i.e., (gift) authorship without the knowledge and contribution of a person, or unacknowledged (ghost) authorship. The third issue is plagiarism and duplicate publication and the fourth issue is data fabrication or falsification. A definition and description of these issues can be found in [1]. In order to define clear rules and to avoid these issues, **publication ethics guidelines** are needed for three groups: Authors, reviewers, and editors. For reviewers and editors, such guidelines are promoted by the **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)** [3].

> **COPE** "is a forum for editors and publishers of peer reviewed journals to discuss all aspects of publication ethics. [...] COPE provides advice to editors and publishers on all aspects of publication ethics and, in particular, how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct." [3]

The charitable company COPE was established in 1997 and, today, has over 7000 members. Among others, all journals of *Elsevier*, *Wiley-Blackwell*, *Springer*, and *Taylor & Francis* are members of COPE. COPE publishes the so-called "Code of Conduct" [4]. Furthermore, COPE publishes "Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors" and "Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers" [5] and provides an online discussion platform on topics of scientific misconduct in publication ethics [3].

In the following three sections, the guidelines for authors, reviewers, and editors are described.

2 Ethical Obligations and Guidelines for Authors

The nature and complexity of ethical issues depends strongly on the scientific field. It is the goal of IFAC to provide scientific guidelines that are geared towards the special situation in the field of automatic control.

This list is based on experience in other scientific fields[1,2]. Authors of scholarly publications in automatic control should adhere to the following ethical guidelines.

1. An author's central obligation is to present an accurate and complete account of the research performed, absolutely avoiding deception, including the data collected or used, as well as an objective discussion of the significance of the research [7].

2. The corresponding author must have the approval of all authors for each submission and the publication of the manuscript.

3. Ghost authorships and gift authorships are not permitted, i.e., the authors' list contains all people, and only those people, who have made a noteworthy contribution to the research behind the manuscript and to the manuscript itself. Other contributions should be indicated in a footnote or an "Acknowledgments" section.

4. The material in any newly submitted paper should be original. If the paper is based on a prior publication, its contents must be substantially different from the previous version. The authors need to indicate how the new paper differs from relevant previous publications. In particular, the additional original contribution in the new paper has to be pointed out explicitly. The previous paper has to be cited and discussed like any other paper in the list of references.[3] This also holds if the previous publication has been published in connection with a conference (conference proceedings, edited book volumes for conferences, etc.).

5. All material which is based on prior work, including from the same authors, must be properly attributed to the prior publication by proper citation.

6. The manuscript should not contain any figures or other material copied from anyone else without their written permission and proper citation in the manuscript.

7. It is the authors' duty to find and cite the original publications that present closely related work. Furthermore, the authors need to identify the source of all information quoted or offered, except that which is common knowledge.

8. While criticism regarding the scientific work of others may be appropriate, personal criticism is never acceptable.

9. Potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, must be disclosed to the editor with the submission.

10. The research itself, as reported in the manuscript, should have been conducted in accordance with commonly accepted ethical standards.

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[1]Shewan, L. & Coats, A., *Ethics in the authorship and publishing of scientific articles*, International Journal of Cardiology, Vol. 144, 2010, pp 1-2.

[2]*Ethical Guidelines to Publication of Chemical Research*, American Chemical Society (ACS), 2012.

[3]adapted from *Automatica "Information for Authors"*. `http://www.autsubmit.com/authorinfo.html`.

11. The authors have the obligation to notify the editor immediately should any of the statements in this list cease to be true.

It is the goal of IFAC to regularly monitor whether these criteria are still valid and whether they needed to be adapted changed, or added to.

3 Ethical Obligations and Guidelines for Reviewers

The guidelines provided by COPE are well suited for the broad automatic control community. Therefore it is suggested that reviewers involved in the publication process for IFAC Journals, IFAC affiliated Journals, and IFAC Conference Proceedings should adhere to the "COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers" [5], see Appendix A.

4 Ethical Obligations and Guidelines for Editors

The guidelines provided by COPE are well suited for the broad automatic control community. Therefore it is suggested that editors involved in the publication process for IFAC Journals, IFAC affiliated Journals, and IFAC Conference Proceedings should adhere to the "COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors" [5], see Appendix B.

All IFAC Journals satisfy the standards set by these guidelines. IFAC affiliated Journals need to satisfy these criteria in the large and are regularly checked on their status in this respect.

References

[1] *Springer Policy on Publishing Integrity – Guidelines for Journal Editors*, Springer, 2010.

[2] Nylenna, M., & Simonsen, S., *Scientific misconduct: a new approach to prevention*, The Lancet, Vol. 367, 2006, pp 1882-1884.

[3] COPE Committee on Publication Ethics. `www.publicationethics.org`.

[4] `http://publicationethics.org/resources/code-conduct`.

[5] `http://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines`.

[6] Shewan, L. & Coats, A., *Ethics in the authorship and publishing of scientific articles*, International Journal of Cardiology, Vol. 144, 2010, pp 1-2.

[7] *Ethical Guidelines to Publication of Chemical Research*, American Chemical Society (ACS), 2012.

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A COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers [5]

C|O|P|E COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION ETHICS

COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Irene Hames on behalf of COPE Council
March 2013, v.1

Peer review in all its forms 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

- 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

COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Expectations during the peer-review process

On being approached to review

Peer reviewers should:

- respond in a reasonable time-frame, especially if they cannot do the review, and without intentional delay.

- declare if they do not have the subject expertise required to carry out the review or if they are able to assess only part of the manuscript, outlining clearly the areas for which they have the relevant expertise.

- only agree to review a manuscript if they are fairly confident they can return a review within the proposed or mutually agreed time-frame, informing the journal promptly if they require an extension.

- declare any potentially conflicting or competing interests (which may, for example, be personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious), seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest.

- follow journals' policies on situations they consider to represent a conflict to reviewing. If no guidance is provided, they should inform the journal if: they work at the same institution as any of the authors (or will be joining that institution or are applying for a job there); they are or have been recent (e.g. within the past 3 years) mentors, mentees, close collaborators or joint grant holders; they have a close personal relationship with any of the authors.

- review afresh any manuscript they have previously reviewed for another journal as it may have changed between the two submissions and the journals' criteria for evaluation and acceptance may be different.

- ensure suggestions for alternative reviewers are based on suitability and not influenced by personal considerations or made with the intention of the manuscript receiving a specific outcome (either positive or negative).

- not agree to review a manuscript just to gain sight of it with no intention of submitting a review.

- decline to review if they feel unable to provide a fair and unbiased review.

- decline to review if they have been involved with any of the work in the manuscript or its reporting.

- decline to review if asked to review a manuscript that is very similar to one they have in preparation or under consideration at another journal.

- decline to review if they have issues with the peer-review model used by a journal (e.g. it uses open review and releases the reviewers' names to the authors) that would either affect their review or cause it to be invalidated because of their inability to comply with the journal's review policies.

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COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

During review

Peer reviewers should:

- notify the journal immediately and seek advice if they discover either a conflicting interest that wasn't apparent when they agreed to the review or anything that might prevent them providing a fair and unbiased review.

- refrain from looking at the manuscript and associated material while awaiting instructions from a journal on issues that might cause the request to review to be rescinded.

- read the manuscript, ancillary material (e.g. reviewer instructions, required ethics and policy statements, supplemental data files) and journal instructions thoroughly, getting back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items they need to carry out a full review.

- notify the journal as soon as possible if they find they do not have the expertise to assess all aspects of the manuscript; they shouldn't wait until submitting their review as this will unduly delay the review process.

- not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript, including junior researchers they are mentoring, without first obtaining permission from the journal; the names of any individuals who have helped them with the review should be included with the returned review so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records and can also receive due credit for their efforts.

- keep all manuscript and review details confidential.

- contact the journal if circumstances arise that will prevent them from submitting a timely review, providing an accurate estimate of the time they will need to do a review if still asked to do so.

- in the case of double-blind review, if they suspect the identity of the author(s) notify the journal if this knowledge raises any potential conflict of interest.

- notify the journal immediately if they come across any irregularities, have concerns about ethical aspects of the work, are aware of substantial similarity between the manuscript and a concurrent submission to another journal or a published article, or suspect that misconduct may have occurred during either the research or the writing and submission of the manuscript; reviewers should, however, keep their concerns confidential and not personally investigate further unless the journal asks for further information or advice.

- not intentionally prolong the review process, either by delaying the submission of their review or by requesting unnecessary additional information from the journal or author.

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COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

- ensure their review is based on the merits of the work and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual biases.

- not contact the authors directly without the permission of the journal.

When preparing the report

Peer reviewers should:

- bear in mind that the editor is looking to them for subject knowledge, good judgement, and an honest and fair assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the work and the manuscript.

- make clear at the start of their review if they have been asked to address only specific parts or aspects of a manuscript and indicate which these are.

- follow journals' instructions on the specific feedback that is required of them and, unless there are good reasons not to, the way this should be organized.

- be objective and constructive in their reviews and provide feedback that will help the authors to improve their manuscript.

- not make derogatory personal comments or unfounded accusations.

- be specific in their criticisms, and provide evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements such as, 'this work has been done before', to help editors in their evaluation and decision and in fairness to the authors.

- remember it is the authors' paper and not attempt to rewrite it to their own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important.

- be aware of the sensitivities surrounding language issues that are due to the authors writing in a language that is not their own, and phrase the feedback appropriately and with due respect.

- make clear which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work.

- not prepare their report in such a way or include comments that suggest the review has been done by another person.

- not prepare their report in a way that reflects badly or unfairly on another person.

- not make unfair negative comments or include unjustified criticisms of any competitors' work that is mentioned in the manuscript.

- ensure their comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with their report for the authors; most feedback should be put in the report for the authors.

- confidential comments to the editor should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see these comments.

- not suggest that authors include citations to the reviewer's (or their associates') work merely to increase the reviewer's (or their associates') citation count or to enhance the visibility of their or their associates' work; suggestions must be based on valid academic or technological reasons.

- determine whether the journal allows them to sign their reviews and, if it does, decide as they feel comfortable doing.

- if they are the editor handling a manuscript and decide themselves to provide a review of that manuscript, do this transparently and not under the guise of an anonymous review if the journal operates blind review; providing a review for a manuscript being handled by another editor at the journal can be treated as any other review.

Expectations post review

Peer reviewers should:

- continue to keep details of the manuscript and its review confidential.

- respond promptly if contacted by a journal about matters related to their review of a manuscript and provide the information required.

- contact the journal if anything relevant comes to light after they have submitted their review that might affect their original feedback and recommendations.

- read the reviews from the other reviewers, if these are provided by the journal, to improve their own understanding of the topic or the decision reached.

- try to accommodate requests from journals to review revisions or resubmissions of manuscripts they have reviewed.

B COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors [5]

Good Editors should:

(1) General duties and responsibilities

- actively seek the views of authors, readers, reviewers and editorial board members about ways of improving their journal's processes

- encourage and be aware of research into peer review and 'journalology' and reassess journal processes in the light of new findings

- work to persuade their publishers to provide them with appropriate resources, guidance from experts (e.g. designers, lawyers) and adequate training to perform their role in a professional manner and raise the quality of their journal

- support initiatives designed to reduce academic misconduct

- support initiatives to educate researchers about publication ethics

- assess the effects of their journal policies on author and reviewer behaviour and revise policies, as required, to encourage responsible behaviour and discourage misconduct

- ensure that any press releases issued by the journal reflect the message of the reported article and put it into context

(2) Relations with readers

- ensure that all published reports of research have been reviewed by suitably qualified reviewers (e.g. including statistical review where appropriate)

- ensure that non-peer-reviewed sections of their journal are clearly identified

- adopt processes that encourage accuracy, completeness and clarity of research reporting (e.g. technical editing, use of CONSORT checklist for randomised trials[1],[2])

- consider developing a transparency policy to encourage maximum disclosure about the provenance of non-research articles[3]

- adopt authorship or contributorship systems that promote good practice (i.e. so that listings accurately reflect who did the work)[4] and discourage misconduct (e.g. ghost and guest authors)

- inform readers about steps taken to ensure that submissions from members of the journal's staff or editorial board receive an objective and unbiased evaluation

(3) Relations with authors

- publish clear instructions in their journals about submission and what they expect from authors

- provide guidance about criteria for authorship and/or who should be listed as a contributor

- review author instructions regularly and provide links to relevant guidelines (e.g. ICMJE, COPE)

- require all contributors to disclose relevant competing interests and publish corrections if competing interests are revealed after publication

- ensure that appropriate reviewers are selected for submissions (i.e. individuals who are able to judge the work and are free from disqualifying competing interests)

- respect requests from authors that an individual should not review their submission, if these are well-reasoned.

- be guided by the COPE flowcharts in cases of suspected misconduct or disputed authorship

- publish details of how they handle cases of suspected misconduct (e.g. with links to the COPE flowcharts)

(4) Relations with reviewers

- provide clear advice to reviewers (which should be straightforward and regularly updated)

- require reviewers to disclose any potential competing interests before agreeing to review a submission

COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors

- encourage reviewers to comment on ethical questions and possible research misconduct raised by submissions, (e.g. unethical research design, insufficient detail on patient consent or protection of research subjects, including animals)

- encourage reviewers to ensure the originality of submissions and be alert to redundant publication and plagiarism

- consider providing reviewers with tools to detect related publications (e.g. links to cited references and bibliographic searches)

- seek to acknowledge the contribution of reviewers to the journal

- encourage academic institutions to recognise peer-review activities as part of the scholarly process

- monitor the performance of peer reviewers and take steps to ensure this is of high quality

- develop and maintain a database of suitable reviewers, and update this on the basis of reviewer performance

- remove from the journal's database any reviewers who consistently produce discourteous, poor quality or late reviews

- seek to add new reviewers to the database to replace those who have been removed (because of poor performance or other reasons)

- ensure that the reviewer database reflects the academic community for their journal (e.g. by auditing the database in terms of reviewer age, gender, location, etc.)

- use a wide range of sources (not just personal contacts) to identify potential new reviewers (e.g. author suggestions, bibliographic databases)

- follow the COPE flowchart in cases of suspected reviewer misconduct

(5)   Relations with editorial board members

- identify suitably qualified editorial board members who can actively contribute to the development and good management of the journal

- appoint editorial board members for a fixed term of office (e.g. three years)

- provide clear guidance to editorial board members about their expected functions and duties, these might include:
  - ◊ acting as ambassadors for the journal
  - ◊ supporting and promoting the journal
  - ◊ seeking out the best authors and best work (e.g. from meeting abstracts) and actively encouraging submissions
  - ◊ reviewing submissions to the journal
  - ◊ accepting commissions to write editorials, reviews and commentaries on papers in their specialist area
  - ◊ attending and contributing to editorial board meetings

- consult editorial board members regularly (at least once a year) to gauge their opinions about the running of the journal, inform them of any changes to journal policies, and identify future challenges

(6)   Relations with journal owners and publishers

- establish mechanisms to handle disagreements between themselves and the journal owner/publisher with due process[5]

- have a written contract(s) setting out their relationship with the journal's owner and/or publisher (the terms of this contract should be in line with the COPE Code of Conduct)

- communicate regularly with their journal's owners and publishers

(7)   Editorial and peer-review processes

- ensure that people involved with the editorial process (including themselves) receive adequate training and keep abreast of the latest guidelines, recommendations and evidence about peer review and journal management

- keep informed about research into peer review and technological advances

- adopt peer-review methods best suited for their journal and the research community it serves

- review peer-review practices periodically to see if improvement is possible

- refer troubling cases to COPE, especially when questions arise that are not addressed by the COPE flow charts, or new types of publication misconduct are suspected

- consider appointing an ombudsperson to adjudicate in complaints that cannot be resolved internally

(8) Quality assurance

- have systems in place to detect falsified data, e.g. manipulated photographic images or plagiarised text (either for routine use or when suspicions are raised)

- base decisions about journal house style on relevant evidence of factors that raise the quality of reporting (e.g. adopting structured abstracts, applying guidance such as CONSORT[2]) rather than simply on aesthetic grounds or personal preference

(9) Protecting individual data

- publish their policy on publishing individual data (e.g. identifiable patient details or images) and explain this clearly to authors

(10) Encouraging academic integrity

- request evidence of ethical research approval for all relevant submissions and be prepared to question authors about aspects such as how patient consent was obtained or what methods were employed to minimize animal suffering

- ensure that reports of clinical trials cite compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki[6], Good Clinical Practice[7] and other relevant guidelines to safeguard participants

- ensure that reports of experiments on, or studies of, animals cite compliance with the US Department of Health and Human Services Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals[8] or other relevant guidelines

- consider appointing a journal ethics panel to advise on specific cases and review journal policies periodically

(11) Ensuring the integrity of the academic record

- take steps to reduce covert redundant publication, e.g. by requiring all clinical trials to be registered[9]

- ensure that published material is securely archived (e.g. via online permanent repositories, such as PubMed Central)[10]

- have systems in place to give authors the opportunity to make original research articles freely available

(12) Intellectual property

- adopt systems for detecting plagiarism (e.g. software, searching for similar titles) in submitted items (either routinely or when suspicions are raised)

- support authors whose copyright has been breached or who have been the victims of plagiarism

- be prepared to defend authors' rights and pursue offenders (e.g. by requesting retractions or removal of material from websites) irrespective of whether their journal holds the copyright

(13) Commercial considerations

- have policies and systems in place to ensure that commercial considerations do not affect editorial decisions (e.g. advertising departments should operate independently from editorial departments)

- publish a description of their journal's income sources (e.g. the proportions received from display advertising, reprint sales, special supplements, page charges, etc.)

- ensure that the peer-review process for sponsored supplements is the same as that used for the main journal

- ensure that items in sponsored supplements are accepted solely on the basis of academic merit and interest to readers and is not influenced by commercial considerations

COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors

(14) Conflicts of interest

- publish lists of relevant interests (financial, academic and other kinds) of all editorial staff and members of editorial boards (which should be updated at least annually)

- adopt suitable policies for handling submissions from themselves, employees or members of the editorial board to ensure unbiased review (and have these set out in writing)

References / further reading

1   CONSORT statement. www.consort-statement.org

2   Plint AC, *et al*. Does the CONSORT checklist improve the quality of reports of randomised controlled trials? A systematic review. *MJA* 2006;**185**:263–7.

3   BMJ transparency policy. http://resources.bmj.com/bmj/authors/editorial-policies/transparency-policy

4   Marusic A, *et al*. How the structure of contribution disclosure statements affects validity of authorship: a randomized study in a general medical journal. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2006;**22**:1035–44.

5   World Association of Medical Editors statement on the relationship between journal editors-in-chief and owners. http://www.wame.org/resources/policies

6   World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. http://www.wma.net/e/ethicsunit/helsinki.htm

7   Good Clinical Practice. http://www.emea.europa.eu/pdfs/human/ich/013595en.pdf

8   US Dept of Health and Human Services Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/labrats/

9   De Angelis C, *et al*. Clinical trial registration: a statement from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. *Lancet* 2004;**364**:911–2.

10   http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/