



PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN SCHOLARLY
RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION

Why the Code of Conduct for Journal Editors was replaced with the Core Practices

Introduction

A Code of Conduct for Editors was in place at COPE from 2004 until 2017. Although this and other documents were immensely valuable in guiding COPE and how editors, publishers and journals function, they were also criticised as being overly specific in some areas and not specific enough in others. Furthermore, they did not reflect many new practices in publishing nor did they have flexibility for future developments.

The Core Practices were developed in 2017. They are applicable to all involved in publishing scholarly literature: editors and their journals, publishers, and institutions. The Core Practices should be considered alongside specific national and international codes of conduct for research and are not intended to replace these.

Why the Code of Conduct for Journal Editors was replaced with the Core Practices

COPE reviewed the [Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines](#) for Editors and consolidated them into one, much shorter, document entitled 'Core Practices'. The choice of the name is deliberate. The phrase Code of Conduct was misinterpreted as being quasi legal, which is inappropriate given COPE's [role as a membership organisation](#) with no statutory or regulatory powers. COPE's intention is to advise on what the expectations are of core practices for all journals, editors and publishers to work towards, with the aim of building a set of professional practices, not just for members of COPE.

COPE's role is to assist editors of scholarly journals and publishers/owners - as well as other parties, such as universities and research institutions – and funders, albeit less directly - in their endeavour to preserve and promote the integrity of the scholarly record through policies and practices that reflect the current [best principles of transparency](#), as well as integrity. COPE's new recommendations, the core practices, are intended to reflect these aims, in a practical way.

COPE took a two step approach in devising the Core Practices:

1. It radically simplified the core expectations of all involved in publishing the scholarly literature: editors and their journals, publishers (and institutions).
2. The expectations laid out in the Core Practices are just the framework. Hanging off each of these core practices are hyperlinks to the detailed documents and resources COPE already publish.

Already we have a suite of documents ranging from flowcharts to guidance documents, which are derived from consultation documents and, before that, from informal conversation at forums. COPE's intention is to use all methods of consultation with our membership to build the library of Core Practices.

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Core practices

Allegations of misconduct

Journals should have a clearly described process for handling allegations, however they are brought to the journal's or publisher's attention. Journals must take seriously allegations of misconduct pre-publication and post-publication. Policies should include how to handle allegations from whistleblowers.

Authorship and contributorship

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.

Complaints and appeals

Journals should have a clearly described process for handling complaints against the journal, its staff, editorial board or publisher.

Conflicts of interest / Competing interests

There must be clear definitions of conflicts of interest and processes for handling conflicts of interest of authors, reviewers, editors, journals and publishers, whether identified before or after publication.

Data and reproducibility

Journals should include policies on data availability and encourage the use of reporting guidelines and registration of clinical trials and other study designs according to standard practice in their discipline.

Ethical oversight

Ethical oversight should include, but is not limited to, policies on consent to publication, publication on vulnerable populations, ethical conduct of research using animals, ethical conduct of research using human subjects, handling confidential data and ethical business/marketing practices.

Intellectual property

All policies on intellectual property, including copyright and publishing licenses, should be clearly described. In addition, any costs associated with publishing should be obvious to authors and readers. Policies should be clear on what counts as prepublication that will preclude consideration. What constitutes plagiarism and redundant/overlapping publication should be specified.

Journal management

A well-described and implemented infrastructure is essential, including the business model, policies, processes and software for efficient running of an editorially independent journal, as well as the efficient management and training of editorial boards and editorial and publishing staff.

Peer review processes

All peer review processes must be transparently described and well managed. Journals should provide training for editors and reviewers and have policies on diverse aspects of peer review, especially with respect to adoption of appropriate models of review and processes for handling conflicts of interest, appeals and disputes that may arise in peer review.

Post-publication discussions and corrections

Journals must allow debate post publication either on their site, through letters to the editor, or on an external moderated site, such as PubPeer. They must have mechanisms for correcting, revising or retracting articles after publication.

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