What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(a) Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer informs editor about redundant publication

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

Check degree of overlap/redundancy

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

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

Author responds

No response

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Consider informing author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Inform author(s) of your action

Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

No response

Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Try to obtain acknowledgement of your letter

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

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

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

Minor overlap with some element of redundancy or legitimate reanalysis (e.g. sub-group/extended follow-up/discussion aimed at different audience)

Contact author in neutral terms expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position

Explain that secondary papers must refer to original

Request missing reference to original and/or remove overlapping material

Proceed with review

No significant overlap

Discuss with reviewer
Proceed with review

Note: ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original

Note: The instructions to authors should state the journal’s policy on redundant publication
Asking authors to sign a statement or tick a box may be helpful in subsequent investigations

Committee on Publication Ethics Flowchart
www.publicationethics.org.uk

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What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(b) Suspected redundant publication in a published article

Reader informs editor about redundant publication

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

Check degree of overlap/redundancy

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

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

Author responds

Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt

Consider publishing statement of redundant publication or retraction
Inform editor of other journal involved

Note: The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication
Asking authors to sign a statement or tick a box may be helpful in subsequent investigations

Minor overlap ('salami publishing' with some element of redundancy) or legitimate re-analysis (e.g. sub-group/extended follow-up/discussion aimed at different audience)

Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal's position
Explain that secondary papers must refer to original
Discuss publishing correction giving reference to original paper
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

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for current affiliations/emails)

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

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

Write to author (all authors if possible) explaining position and expected future behaviour

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

Consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Inform author(s) of your action
Inform reader of outcome/action

Note: ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original
Editors may consider publishing a correction (i.e. the link to the original article) rather than a retraction/notice of duplicate publication in such cases

Inform reader of outcome/action

Committee on Publication Ethics Flowchart
www.publicationethics.org.uk

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A non-exclusive licence to reproduce these flowcharts may be applied for by writing to: cope@bmjgroup.com
What to do if you suspect plagiarism
(a) Suspected plagiarism in a submitted manuscript

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 (unattributed use of large portions of text and/or data, presented as if they were by the plagiarist)

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work is original/the author's own and documentary evidence of plagiarism

Minor copying of short phrases only (e.g. in discussion of research paper from non-native language speaker) No misattribution of data

Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal's position Ask author to rephrase copied phrases or include as direct quotations with references Proceed with review

Redundancy (i.e. copying from author's own work)—see flowcharts on redundancy

No problem

Discuss with reviewer

Author responds

No response

Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

No response

Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance and/or potential victim

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission or requesting revision, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Inform author(s) of your action

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

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

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work is original/the author's own and documentary evidence of plagiarism

Minor copying of short phrases only (e.g. in discussion of research paper from non-native language speaker) No misattribution of data

Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal's position Ask author to rephrase copied phrases or include as direct quotations with references Proceed with review

Redundancy (i.e. copying from author's own work)—see flowcharts on redundancy

Discuss with reviewer

Author responds

No response

Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

No response

Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance and/or potential victim

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission or requesting revision, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Inform author(s) of your action

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

Note: The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on it
What to do if you suspect plagiarism

(b) Suspected plagiarism in a published article

Reader informs editor about suspected plagiarism

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

Check degree of copying

Clear plagiarism (unattributed use of large portions of text and/or data, presented as if they were by the plagiarist)

- Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that work is original/the author’s own and documentary evidence of plagiarism

Minor copying of short phrases only (e.g., in discussion of research paper)
- No misattribution of data

- Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position
  - Discuss publishing correction giving reference to original paper(s) if this has been omitted

Author responds

- No response

- Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt
  - Contact all authors and tell them what you plan to do

- Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)
  - Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for current affiliations/emails)

- No response
  - Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Consider publishing retraction
- Inform editor of other journal(s) involved or publisher of plagiarised books

Consider informing author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance at author’s institution

Inform author(s) of your action

- Inform readers and victim(s) of outcome/action

Note: The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal’s policy on it
What to do if you suspect fabricated data
(a) Suspected fabricated data in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer expresses suspicion of fabricated data

Thank reviewer, ask for evidence (if not already provided) and state your plans to investigate

Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer

Assemble evidence of fabrication

Contact author to explain concerns but do not make direct accusation

Author replies

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Author replies

No response

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

No response

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Inform reviewer(s) of outcome Proceed with peer-review if appropriate

Contact author’s institution(s) requesting an investigation

No or unsatisfactory response

Author cleared

Author found guilty

Reject

Apologise to author, proceed with peer-review if appropriate

Inform reviewer of outcome

If raw data are supplied these should be assessed by a suitably qualified person, ideally in cooperation with the author’s institution

Request raw data/lab notebooks as appropriate

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Apologise to author, inform reviewer(s) of outcome Proceed with peer-review if appropriate

Contact author’s institution(s) requesting an investigation

No or unsatisfactory response

Author cleared

Author found guilty

Reject

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Inform reviewer of outcome

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Inform all authors that you intend to contact institution/regulatory body
What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published article

Reader expresses suspicion of fabricated data

Thank reader and state your plans to investigate

Consider getting a 2nd opinion from another reviewer

Assemble evidence of fabrication

Contact author to explain your concerns
Request raw data/lab notebooks as appropriate

Author replies

No response

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

Author replies

No response

Author(s) guilty

Author(s) found not guilty

Unsatisfactory answer/admits guilt

Satisfactory explanation

Inform all authors you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

Contact author's institution requesting an investigation

Author(s) guilty of fabrication

Apologise to author(s)

Publish retraction

Publish correction if necessary (e.g. if an honest error has been detected)
Inform reader of outcome

Contact author to explain your concerns

If raw data are supplied these should be assessed by a suitably qualified person, ideally in cooperation with the author's institution

Contact regulatory body (e.g. GMC for UK doctors) requesting an enquiry

No or unsatisfactory response

Publish expression of concern

Inform reader of outcome

Inform all authors you intend to contact institution/regulatory body

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

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

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Changes in authorship
(a) Corresponding author requests addition of extra author before publication

- Clarify reason for change in authorship
- Check that all authors consent to addition of extra author

All authors agree
- Get new author to complete journal's authorship declaration (if used)
- Amend contributor details (role of each contributor/author) if included
- Proceed with review/publication

Authors do not agree
- Suspend review/publication of paper until authorship has been agreed by all authors, if necessary, via institution(s)

Note: major changes in response to reviewer comments, e.g., adding new data might justify the inclusion of a new author
Changes in authorship

(b) Corresponding author requests removal of author before publication

- Clarify reason for change in authorship
- Check that all authors consent to removal of author

- All authors agree
  - Amend author list and contributor details (role of each contributor/author)/acknowledgements as required
  - Proceed with review/publication

- Authors do not agree
  - Suspend review/publication of paper until authorship has been agreed
  - Inform excluded author(s) that if they wish to pursue the matter they should do this with their co-authors or institutions rather than the editor

Most important to check with the author(s) whose name(s) is/are being removed from the paper and get their agreement in writing.

Most important to check with the author(s) whose name(s) is/are being removed from the paper and get their agreement in writing.
Changes in authorship
(c) Request for addition of extra author after publication

Clarify reason for change in authorship

Check that all authors consent to addition of extra author

All authors agree

Authors do not agree

Publish correction if required by institution(s)

All authors agree

Authors do not agree

Explain that you will not change the authorship until you have written agreement from all authors

Provide authorship guidelines but do not enter into dispute

Authors still cannot agree

Explain why author was omitted from original list – ideally, refer to journal guidelines or authorship declaration that should state that all authors meet appropriate criteria and that no deserving authors have been omitted

To prevent future problems:
(1) Before publication, get authors to sign statement that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted
(2) Publish details of each person's contribution to the research and publication
Changes in authorship
(d) Request for removal of author after publication

Clarify reason for change in authorship

- Author(s) gives acceptable reason for change
  - Check that all authors agree to change (including excluded author)
  - Publish correction

- Author(s) alleges fraud / misconduct
  - See flowchart for fabricated data
  - Author(s) has difference in interpretation of data
    - Suggest author(s) put views in a letter and explain you will give other authors a chance to respond and will publish both letters if suitable (i.e. correct length, not libellous)

- Author(s) writes a letter
  - Contact other authors explaining what is happening
    - Other authors submit response
      - Publish both letters
    - Other authors do not wish to respond
      - Publish minority view letter

- Author(s) does not agree to write letter (or writes something unpublishable)
  - If author insists on removal of name and other authors agree, then consider publishing correction
  - Suggest author(s) put views in a letter and explain you will give other authors a chance to respond and will publish both letters if suitable (i.e. correct length, not libellous)

Ask why author wishes to be removed from list – refer to journal guidelines or authorship declaration which should state that all authors meet appropriate criteria. Ask if author suspects fraud/misconduct.
What to do if a reviewer suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer informs editor of author's undisclosed Col → Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate → Contact author(s) and express concern → Author(s) supplies relevant details → Thank author but point out seriousness of omission → Amend competing interest statement as required → Proceed with review/publication → Inform reviewer of outcome

Author(s) denies Col → Explain journal policy/Col definition clearly and obtain signed statement from author(s) about all relevant Cols → Author(s) supplies relevant details

To avoid future problems:
Always get signed statement of Cols from all authors before publication (or get them to tick a box if they declare no conflict) Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of Col
What to do if a reader suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a published article

1. Reader informs editor of author's undisclosed Col
2. Thank reader and say you plan to investigate
3. Contact author(s) and express concern
   - Author(s) supplies relevant details
   - Thank author but point out seriousness of omission
   - Publish correction to competing interest statement as required
   - Inform reader of outcome
   - Explain journal policy/Col definition clearly and obtain signed statement from author(s) about all relevant Cols (if not obtained previously)

It may be helpful to provide a copy of the journal's policy/definition of Col

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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What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript

Reviewer (or editor) raises ethical concern about manuscript

Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate

Author(s) supplies relevant details

Reviewer (or editor) raises ethical concern about manuscript

Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate

Author(s) supplies relevant details

Satisfactory answer

Apologise and continue review process

Unsatisfactory answer/no response

Inform author that review process is suspended until case is resolved

Consider submitting case to COPE if it raises novel ethical issues

Forward concerns to author's employer or person responsible for research governance at institution

Issue resolved satisfactory

No/unsatisfactory response

Contact institution at 3-6 monthly intervals, seeking conclusion of investigation

Inform reviewer about outcome of case

Refer to other authorities (e.g. medical registration body, UKPRI, ORI)
How COPE handles complaints against editors

1. **Complaint sent to COPE secretary**

2. **Secretary checks that complaint:**
   - is against a COPE member
   - is within the remit of the COPE Code of Conduct
   - has been through journal’s own complaints procedure
   - relates to actions taken after 1/1/05 (when COPE Code was published)

3. **If not, COPE cannot consider complaint**

4. **Complainant may try other organisations, e.g. Press Complaints Commission, WAME**

5. **Evidence sent to Chair of COPE including correspondence about journal’s handling of complaints**

6. **Chair of COPE informs editor of complaint**

7. **Chair consults with at least one member of COPE Council**

8. **Agree that journal has dealt satisfactorily with complaint**

9. **Agree that case requires further investigation**

10. **Refer to COPE sub-committee**

11. **Sub-committee considers case and reports to COPE Council**

12. **Council considers case and recommends action**

13. **Editor and complainant are informed**

**Actions might include:**
- editor apologises to complainant
- editor publishes statement from COPE in journal
- journal/editor agrees to improve procedures

**Sub-committee will comprise:**
- Chair
- Three other Council members (two of whom are not editors)
  Members may not work for the same publishing group as the subject of the complaint

**If the Chair of COPE belongs to the same publishing group as the subject of the complaint, the case will be handled by the Vice-Chair**