



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Open Letter to Authors for APA Journals

Dear Colleague,

This letter is being sent routinely for information purposes to everyone who submits an article to an APA journal. Please feel free to distribute it to your colleagues and students.

The scientific literature is our institutional memory. It is important that this literature accurately reflect what happened, who did it, and to what extent one observation is independent of another. APA is seriously concerned about the integrity of our literature and has included a section on publication in the APA Ethical Guidelines (see the December 2002 issue of the *American Psychologist*, pp. 1060–1073, or <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). The section on publication is reprinted on the reverse side of this letter.

We can prevent problems before they occur in two major areas addressed in these guidelines. One deals with plagiarism; the other, with duplicate or fragmented publication.

- *Plagiarism.* Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but in professional writing imitation without appropriate attribution is not acceptable. Authors should cite the sources of their ideas and methods as well as put quotation marks around phrases taken from another source. The change or reordering of a few words in a sentence does not relieve authors of the obligation to quote and recognize appropriately the source of their material. As recent cases inform us, authors need to be scrupulous in their notetaking (especially in the electronic form) and careful about using those notes in their own manuscripts.
- *Duplicate/fragmented publication.* Duplicate publication involves publishing the same data more than once. Fragmented (or piecemeal) publication involves dividing the report of a research project into multiple articles. Duplicate or fragmented publications are misleading if they appear to represent independent instances. They can distort the scientific literature, especially in reviews or meta-analyses.

On occasion it may be appropriate to publish several reports referring to the same database. The author should inform the editor at the time of submission about all previously published or submitted reports so the editor can judge if the article represents a new contribution. Readers also should be informed; the text of an article should cite other reports that used the same sample (or a subsample) or the same data and methods.

Sometimes authors want to publish essentially the same material in different journals in order to reach different audiences. There is little need for this practice now that we have computerized retrieval systems to search the literature, and such duplicate publication can rarely be justified. If you think it may be, the article must include reference to the original report—both to inform editors, reviewers, and readers and as a necessary fulfillment of the author's obligations to the previous copyright holder.

In general, the author should inform the editor about the existence of other reports from the same research project at the time of submission. If you are in doubt, please consult with the editor or with the Chief Editorial Advisor for the APA Journals Program, Jennifer Crocker (crocker.37@osu.edu).

Ethical Standards for the Reporting and Publishing of Scientific Information

The following ethical standards are extracted from the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct,” (2002, as amended 2010, 2016) which originally appeared in the December 2002 issue of the *American Psychologist* (Vol. 57, No. 12, pp. 1060–1073). Standards 8.10–8.15 deal with the reporting and publishing of scientific information.

8.10 Reporting Research

- (a) Psychologists do not fabricate data.
- (b) If psychologists discover significant errors in their published data, they take reasonable steps to correct such errors in a correction, retraction, erratum, or other appropriate publication means.

8.11 Plagiarism

Psychologists do not present portions of another’s work or data as their own even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally.

8.12 Publication Credit

- (a) Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed. (See also Standard 8.12b, Publication Credit.)
- (b) Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement.
- (c) Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student’s doctoral dissertation. Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the

research and publication process as appropriate. (See also Standard 8.12b, Publication Credit.)

8.13 Duplicate Publication of Data

Psychologists do not publish, as original data, data that have been previously published. This does not preclude republishing data when they are accompanied by proper acknowledgement.

8.14 Sharing Research Data for Verification

- (a) After research results are published, psychologists do not withhold the data on which their conclusions are based from other competent professionals who seek to verify the substantive claims through reanalysis and who intend to use such data only for that purpose, provided that the confidentiality of the participants can be protected and unless legal rights concerning proprietary data preclude their release. This does not preclude psychologists from requiring that such individuals or groups be responsible for costs associated with the provision of such information.
- (b) Psychologists who request data from other psychologists to verify the substantive claims through reanalysis may use shared data only for the declared purpose. Requesting psychologists obtain prior written agreement for all other uses of the data.

8.15 Reviewers

Psychologists who review material submitted for presentation, publication, grant, or research proposal review respect the confidentiality of and the proprietary rights in such information of those who submitted it.