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Royal Astronomical Society

Editorial Code of Practice

The Royal Astronomical Society serves the astronomical and geophysical communities in several ways, among them through publishing journals which present the results of scientific research. The RAS journals are Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, Geophysical Journal International and RAS Techniques and Instruments.

All stakeholders should note that editorial decisions, and decisions to edit and publish, are not to be influenced by the origins of the manuscript, including the nationality, ethnicity, political beliefs, race, or religion of the authors; nor are they to be determined by the policies of governments, states, jurisdictions or other agencies outside of the journals themselves, except where a decision might place the journals in violation of applicable law.

The RAS journals are members of the Committee on Publication Ethics and follow their guidance on publishing matters.

Issues of publishing misconduct in scientific journal papers can cause considerable conflict among members of research teams and challenges for editors, authors, reviewers and the editorial office. Accordingly, the RAS has produced the following set of guidelines.

Guidelines

Correspondence and reports relating to journal submissions should be considered confidential by all parties -- editors, authors, and reviewers -- and should not be made publicly available without the express permission of the Journal's Editor in Chief.

A. For Editors of the RAS Scientific Journals

1. The Editors of RAS journals are responsible for the Society's guidelines for reviewing and accepting papers submitted to the journals.
2. While ensuring that manuscripts are processed promptly, the aim of an editor is to ensure that the published work will be as accurate, comprehensive, and as scientifically valuable as possible. The editors of the RAS journals will give unbiased consideration to all manuscripts offered for publication, judging each on its merits.
3. The editor is guided by the evaluations of reviewers and may also consult other editors in the course of reaching a decision on the publication of a submitted paper. The editor has complete responsibility and authority to accept or reject a submitted paper for publication.
4. The editor and the Editorial Office will not disclose any information about a manuscript under consideration to anyone other than reviewers, potential reviewers and the Editor-in-Chief or the Deputy Editor-in-Chief. See note (1)
5. The editor should ensure that generative tools and resources from generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) are not used as a substitute for their own expert opinion and judgement.

6. The editor should not share information about the manuscript, its content, or their recommendation with any generative AI entity, including Large Language Models (LLMs) and other machine learning tools.
7. Where an author has chosen to post a paper submitted to an RAS journal to a publicly accessible website (e.g. on a preprint server) or to present material from the paper in a public forum (e.g. at a conference), and subsequently receives comments from third parties which they wish to reflect in the manuscript undergoing peer review, the editor will decide whether to allow such changes to be made or require the paper to be withdrawn and re-submitted.
8. Where, in the circumstances outlined in point 6, comments are directed to the Editorial Office staff or editor they will decide to either a) act on them and if appropriate share them with the relevant reviewer(s), or b) request the third party to contact the author(s) directly.
9. Circumstances where comments from bona fide scholars include serious charges of publishing or professional misconduct by the author(s), which are directly related to a paper in peer review or one already published in the journal, they will be investigated. The Editor-in-Chief, Head of Publishing or Editor will decide whether to involve the author(s). Except where anonymity is essential to protect a complainant from unfair repercussions their identity and the nature of their charge will be divulged to the parties involved in the investigation.
10. Editorial responsibility and authority for any manuscript authored by an editor and submitted to the editor's journal will be delegated to another qualified editor.
11. Editors should avoid situations of real or perceived conflicts of interest. Such conflicts may include, but are not limited to, handling papers from present and former students, from colleagues with whom the editor has recently collaborated, and from those in the same research group.
12. Where, subsequent to publication, errors are identified in a paper, the editor and Oxford University Press will facilitate publication of a Correction Notice.

B. For Authors submitting to the RAS Journals

1. An author's central obligation is to present a concise, accurate account of the research performed as well as an objective discussion of its significance.
2. A paper should contain sufficient detailed information and references to public sources of information to a) permit the author's peers to evaluate it comprehensively and b) enable the reader to reconstruct how the results were obtained.
3. Only persons who have contributed significantly to the research and approved the submission of the paper should be listed as authors.
4. All co-authors share responsibility for submitted articles. While not all co-authors may be familiar with all aspects of the research presented in an article, each should have in place an appropriate process for reviewing the accuracy of the reported results.
5. All authors should be listed on the title page of manuscripts at submission. Where appropriate a collaboration name can be included at the end of the list of the main contributing authors with a link to a list of collaborator names. The names and details of the first 10 authors should be entered onto the manuscript submission system.
6. All forms of ghost authorship, and guest or gift authorship, will be considered unethical and unacceptable. Those who have not contributed significantly to the research in a paper should not be included as authors.
7. It is the responsibility of the submitting author to ascertain any conflicts of interest from co-authors, declare these at the point of submission, and include relevant details in their paper. The submitting author will confirm that all co-authors take responsibility for the content of the paper and have approved its submission
8. Only one corresponding author can be nominated for a paper during the peer review and production processes. No more than three corresponding authors will be allowed in published articles except in special circumstances with permission from the editorial office.

9. Authorship changes after submission will not be allowed unless there is a substantive reason to do so. This includes changes to the authorship list, author order, and who is designated as the corresponding author.
10. Authors are obliged to conduct their research in an ethical and responsible manner.
11. An author, where appropriate following a literature search, should cite those publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Citations should be limited to those articles whose results are used in the present work or to whom credit should be given for the ideas discussed. Authors should check all references in advance of submission and ensure to only include references to verifiable scientific papers.
12. Information obtained in the course of confidential services, such as reviewering manuscripts or grant applications, must not be used in submissions without permission of the author of the work being used.
13. Fragmentation of research papers should be avoided. Authors who fragment their work into a series of papers must be able to justify doing so on the grounds that it enhances scientific communication.
14. It is unethical for an author to publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one journal of primary publication. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently is unethical and unacceptable.
15. Manuscripts posted online in preprint servers, or other non-peer reviewed outlets, will still be considered for publication.
16. An author may make changes to a paper after receiving reviewer's comments but should make no changes to a paper after it has been accepted. If there is a compelling reason to make changes, the author is obligated to inform the editor directly of the nature of the desired change. Only the editor has the final authority to approve any such requested changes.
17. Personal criticism or aggressive and abusive language towards editors, authors, reviewers or the editorial office staff will not be tolerated. The RAS reserves the right to refuse publication to any person who engages in such behaviour in their communications with the journal.
18. Where Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are used to assist in the preparation of a manuscript, this must be declared in the acknowledgements and a citation to the software included in the reference list. AI tools are not permitted as authors as they cannot take responsibility for submitted works.
19. Any author who believes that this Editorial Code of Practice has been breached may register a complaint, in writing, through the Head of Publishing and/or the Editor-in-Chief of the RAS journal concerned. If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily it will be passed to the Executive Director of the Society together with all relevant correspondence. The Executive Director will investigate the complaint and will either dismiss it or conclude that a breach of this Code has taken place. In the latter case appropriate redress, e.g. an apology to the author or a change to editorial reviewing procedures, will be recommended to the Head of Publishing.
20. Authors have the right to appeal a reject decision received on their paper. Authors should refer to the appeals policy in the Author Guidelines for the journal they have submitted their paper to.

C. For Reviewers of Manuscripts

1. Any reviewer who feels inadequately qualified or lacks the time to judge the research reported in a manuscript should inform the editorial staff.
2. A reviewer should judge objectively the quality of the manuscript and respect the intellectual independence of the authors. In no case is personal criticism appropriate.
3. A reviewer should be sensitive even to the appearance of a conflict of interest when the manuscript under review is closely related to the reviewer's work, either published or in progress. If in doubt, they should return the manuscript promptly without review, advising the editor of the conflict of interest or bias.

4. Reviewers should ensure that generative tools and resources from generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) are not used as a substitute for their own expert opinion and judgement.
5. A reviewer should not evaluate a manuscript authored or co-authored by a person with whom the reviewer has a personal or professional connection if the relationship would bias judgement of the manuscript.
6. A reviewer should treat a manuscript sent for review as a confidential document. It should neither be shown to nor discussed with others, except in special cases:
    a. to persons from whom specific advice may be sought; in that event, the identities of those consulted should be disclosed to the editor, and the identities of the authors should not be disclosed to those consulted.
    b. to reviewers-in-training
7. A reviewer should not share information about the manuscript, its content, or their review with any AI entity, including Large Language Models (LLMs) and other machine learning tools.
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9. Reviewers should explain and support their judgements adequately so that editors and authors may understand the basis of their comments. Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument has been previously reported should be accompanied by the relevant citation.
10. A reviewer should be alert to failure of authors to cite relevant work by other scientists.
11. A reviewer should call to the editor's attention any substantial similarity between the manuscript under consideration with any published paper or with any manuscript submitted concurrently to another journal.
12. Reviewers should refrain from suggesting that authors include citations to their (or an associate's) work merely to increase citation counts or to enhance the visibility of their (or their associate's) work.
13. Reviewers should not use or disclose unpublished information, data, arguments, or interpretations contained in a manuscript under consideration, except with the consent of the author.
14. The identity of the reviewer will not be disclosed to the author(s) unless the reviewer chooses to do so.
15. The RAS is grateful to those who peer review for its journals, however it does not offer financial or other rewards to reviewers at this time.

Notes

(1) The RAS Editorial Office will share submitted manuscripts, as necessary, with trusted third parties for the purposes of ethics and integrity checking. For example, all manuscripts are shared with iThenticate (CrossRef) for the purposes of checking similarity with previously published material. All papers are deleted from iThenticate after the checks have been conducted.

(2) Duplicate publication occurs when authors pass off, as original, research that has been published either substantially or in its entirety elsewhere. Duplicate papers have shared hypotheses, data, discussion points, or conclusions, but do not cross-reference the prior publication. Not only does duplicate publication constitute a possible copyright violation, it also deceives the scientific community regarding the extent of knowledge in a given field. While ultimately the decision to publish lies with the journal editor, the burden of responsibility for preventing duplication falls to the author(s). Authors should not submit identical or substantially similar work if it has already been published in another outlet. Examples of alternative outlets include book chapters and published conference proceedings of whole papers (as opposed to

abstracts). The prior publication of any similar work (e.g. other papers based on the same data and methods, or using the same sample) should be clearly referenced in the manuscript. Authors should also inform the editor of any such work already existing, or about to be published. The editor must then decide whether the manuscript includes enough new information to warrant publication.

Authors should avoid 'cutting and pasting' (i.e. copying verbatim) substantial chunks of text from their own previously published work. Moderate duplication, involving no more than a few paragraphs throughout the paper, is acceptable provided that reference is made to the publication in which the material first appeared.

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Sources

1. Committee on Publications Ethics, 'Guidelines on Good Publication Practice'
2. American Astronomical Society, 'Author Instructions'
3. American Geophysical Union, 'Publishing Guidelines'