Ethical Policies and Procedures

Authorship. The Editors of the journals of the American Physiological Society (APS) expect each author to have made an important scientific contribution to the study and to be thoroughly familiar with the original data. The Editors also expect each author to have read the complete manuscript and to take responsibility for the content and completeness of the manuscript and to understand that if the paper, or part of the paper, is found to be faulty or fraudulent, the author must accept full responsibility for the conduct of the trial, had full access to all the data, and controlled the decision to publish. Any potential conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article must be disclosed in the Conflict of Interest Disclosure section of the Web-based manuscript submission system. Links to the submission system can be found on any APS journal home page. Such information, unless already disclosed in the submitted article, will be held in confidence while the paper is under review. If the article is accepted for publication, information on the potential conflict of interest, or lack thereof, must be noted by the author in the manuscript file as a “Disclosures” statement following the Acknowledgments section of the paper.

Editor and Reviewer Conflict of Interest. Editors and Reviewers should avoid making decisions on papers for which they may have a potential conflict of interest, financial or otherwise. Reviewers who are collaborating with the author, or who are working on very similar research, should recuse themselves from reviewing a paper for which they have a conflict. An Editor in Chief should have a Consulting Editor or Associate Editor make a decision on a paper for which he or she has a conflict. When an Editor in Chief submits a paper to his or her journal, the paper is automatically assigned to a Guest Editor, a Consulting Editor, or an Associate Editor, who will handle all aspects of the peer review of the paper. Such reviews are handled in the web-based peer review system in such a way that the author (i.e., the Editor in Chief) will not have access.

Duplicate Publication, Plagiarism, Falsification. The journals of the APS accept only papers that are original work, no part of which has been subsequently published as a whole or in part. A paper accepted as a whole is considered redundant publication or self-plagiarism and is not permitted. The prohibition against duplicate publication includes data from control experiments. Repetition of control experiments is scientifically warranted when the methodology and/or conditions have changed, even to a minimal degree. However, when the methodology and conditions are identical, repetition of control experiments in animal subjects may violate U.S. Animal Welfare Act and Public Health Service Policy requirements as well as standards in other countries, for use of the minimum number of animals needed to accomplish the science. In this case only, reuse of control data will not be considered duplicate publication. Fabricating a report of research or suppressing or altering data to agree with one’s conclusions is considered fraud; this includes altering figures in such a way as to obscure, move, remove, or introduce information or features. Examples of fraudulent/ inappropriate alteration of figures include, but are not limited to, splicing and reassembling noncontiguous lanes of gels without separation by white space or lines and altering the background of blots such that information is lost.

Prior Publication. Material published by the author before submission in the following categories is considered prior publication: 1) articles published in any publication, even online-only, non-peer-reviewed publications, such as Nature Precedings or the physics arXiv (see exception below for the Journal of Neurophysiology); 2) articles, book chapters, and long abstracts containing original data in figures and tables, especially in proceedings papers as well as posters containing original data disseminated beyond meeting attendees, e.g., displayed in websites such as that maintained by F1000; 3) widely circulated, copyrighted, or archival reports, such as the technical reports of IBM, the preliminary reports of MIT, the institute reports of the US Army, or the internal reports of NASA.

Doctoral dissertations that are made available by UMI/Proquest or institutional repositories are not considered prior publication. Data portions of submitted papers that have appeared on a website will be permitted, with the proviso that the author inform the Editor at the time of the submission that such material exists so that the Editor can determine the suitability of such material for publication. Failure to do so will result in an automatic rejection of the manuscript. Examples of such work include, but are not limited to, immunofluorescence micrographs and/or animated gif/video files posted on a website, or NIH-mandated posting of DNA microarray data. After the article is published in an APS journal, the data should be removed from the author’s website.

Authors with concerns about possible prior publication that does not fall clearly into one of these categories should contact the Director of Publications and forward the material for examination.

Authors submitting to the Journal of Neurophysiology (JN) may submit papers that have been previously posted to preprint servers and other non-peer-reviewed websites. Once you have submitted your manuscript to JN, we ask that you not subsequently post this manuscript or a revised version of it, to a preprint server. However, if your manuscript receives a final reject decision at JN or if you withdraw it from editorial consideration at JN, this restriction is then lifted. Authors submitting manuscripts to preprint servers must be sure to retain the copyright to their work, which can then be transferred to the publisher when a later version of the work is accepted at a traditional peer-reviewed journal (this is standard at arXiv and Nature Precedings). Questions about whether a particular preprint server venue is allowed under this rule should be addressed to the JN Editor in Chief, David Linden at dlinden@jhnih.edu. Authors will be asked at submission to disclose whether their manuscript has been posted to a preprint server, to identify the preprint server, and to provide a file of the most recent version of the posting and the DOI or a working link to it. This is a trial exception to APS policy that applies to submissions to the Journal of Neurophysiology through March 14, 2013 and is subject to change thereafter.

Experiments Involving Animals or Humans. Authors using humans, animals, or fetal tissue in their experiments should refer to the APS policies on these subjects: Guiding Principles for Research Involving Animals and Human Beings; and the Policy on the Publication of Research on Human Fetuses, Fetal Tissue, Embryos, and Embryonic Cells.

Ethical Procedure. APS reviewers have a responsibility to report suspected duplicate publication, fraud, plagiarism, or concerns about animal or human experimentation to the Editor. A reviewer may recognize and report that he/she is referencing, or has recently refereed, a similar or identical paper to another journal by the same author(s). Readers are urged to verify that they have not seen the same article elsewhere, or authors may see their own published work being plagiarized. In all cases we address ethical concerns diligently following an issue-specific standard practice as summarized below. The first action of the journal Editor is to inform the Publications Committee Chair through the Director of Publications by supplying copies of 1) the relevant material and 2) a draft letter to the corresponding author asking for an explanation in a nonjudgmental manner. The Publications Committee Chair must approve any correspondence before it is sent to the author. If the author’s explanation is unacceptable and it seems that serious unethical conduct has taken place, the matter is referred to the Publications Committee. After deliberation, the Committee will decide whether the case is sufficiently serious to warrant a ban on future submissions to, and serving as a reviewer for, APS journals and/or if the offending author’s institution should be informed. The decision has to be approved by the Executive Cabinet of the APS Council, and the author has the right to appeal a sanction, with the opportunity to present his/her position, to the Publications Committee and the full APS Council. If the infraction is less severe, the Editor, upon the advice of the Publications Chair, sends the author a letter of reprimand and reminds the author of APS publication policies; if the manuscript has been published, the Editor may require the author to publish an apology in the journal to correct the record. If, through the author’s actions, APS has violated the copyright of another journal, the Publications Chair writes a letter of apology to the other journal.

In serious cases of fraud that result in retraction of the article, a retraction notice will be published in the journal and will be linked to the article in the online version. The online version will also be marked “retracted” with the retraction date.

Updated Spring 2011.