Protect Yourself from Plagiarism

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Publishing a manuscript involves numerous responsibilities as a publisher and an author. Ethically acceptable standards ceaselessly evolve, and therefore it is essential for both authors and the editors (or the journal side) to make sure that these standards are abided by in order to improve the quality of journals as well as maintain the integrity of scientific manuscripts.

One of the topics which create much concern in the area of publication ethics is plagiarism. Plagiarism derives from the Latin word, *plagium*, which means kidnapping a man and is defined as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own.” When you submit a manuscript to a journal, authors are asked to verify that all work reported is original. Plagiarizing is in fact a violation of this understanding. Plagiarism takes on many forms, some more difficult to detect than others. However, with the increased availability of detection software which most major publishers use to scan manuscripts for plagiarism, it is important for authors to know that plagiarism can be recognized very easily and journals take this issue extremely seriously. Authors should remember to always acknowledge another source.

In other words,
1) If you are quoting directly from another source, you need to place the quoted text in quotation marks and cite the source.
2) If you are taking a specific phrase or word from another source, you also need to place it in quotation marks and cite the source.
3) If you are including an idea or opinion from another source, you need to cite the source even if you are paraphrasing it using your own words.
4) If you are using figures or tables from another source, you need to cite the source.

Self-plagiarism and “text-recycling”

You may be familiar with the term, self-plagiarism, also known as text-recycling which has become a prevalent issue. Although this type of plagiarism can occur in different ways, one way would be if any of the above items 1) – 4) was done using your own previously published manuscript without citing the source. This is because once a manuscript is published, the copyright of the manuscript will transfer to the journal, and therefore it is very important to remember to treat any of your previously published materials as though it belonged to someone else.

Text-recycling can be understood to mean that an author reuses parts of previously published materials. There are differences in opinions regarding text-recycling, such as what is acceptable and to what extent. However, because of the vagueness which surrounds this issue, and considering the consequences the author would need to face, it would
be advisable to pay attention and handle with caution. Therefore, if you duplicate parts of your previously published manuscript in a new manuscript, it is better to cite the source and make this fact apparent to the readers of the journal, as they have the right to believe that what they are reading is original material and should not be deceived into believing what is duplicated is actually original. Duplicate publications indeed wastes journal space and resources but most of all, can affect clinical decision-making.

**Consequences of plagiarism**

How is plagiarism handled by journals?

Although the problem of plagiarism is not new, the degree of plagiarism, e.g. whether it would be considered major or minor plagiarism, and how to precisely define, it has left some editors hesitant about taking specific action against it. The Flowcharts produced by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) offer advice to editors and publishers for both submitted and published manuscripts, and depending on the journal’s wishes, the manuscript in question may need rewriting, a note of correction may be published, or it may be rejected or retracted. However, it is mentioned that more discussion and guidance on how to distinguish major and minor plagiarism need to be provided. It is at this stage that many journals depend partially on automatic plagiarism software which is both specific and accurate.

**Closing message**

When in doubt, give the source.

Some might argue when accused of plagiarizing that it was unintentional. However, with the rise in awareness of transparency in scientific writing and increased duties of authors, journals will consider plagiarism to be intentional misconduct and take any necessary actions, taking into account suggestive advice from organizations such as the COPE. The first step in preventing plagiarism is for authors to educate themselves to follow guidelines for producing ethically sound manuscripts, such as the ICMJE recommendations.

**References**