# Ethical issues in peer review

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11 May 2021



Photo by Daniel Gregoire on Unsplash

# What we'll cover today

- What publishers, editors and reviewers can do to ensure ethical peer review
- How to navigate the peer review process as a researcher
- Wiley's Better Peer Review initiative



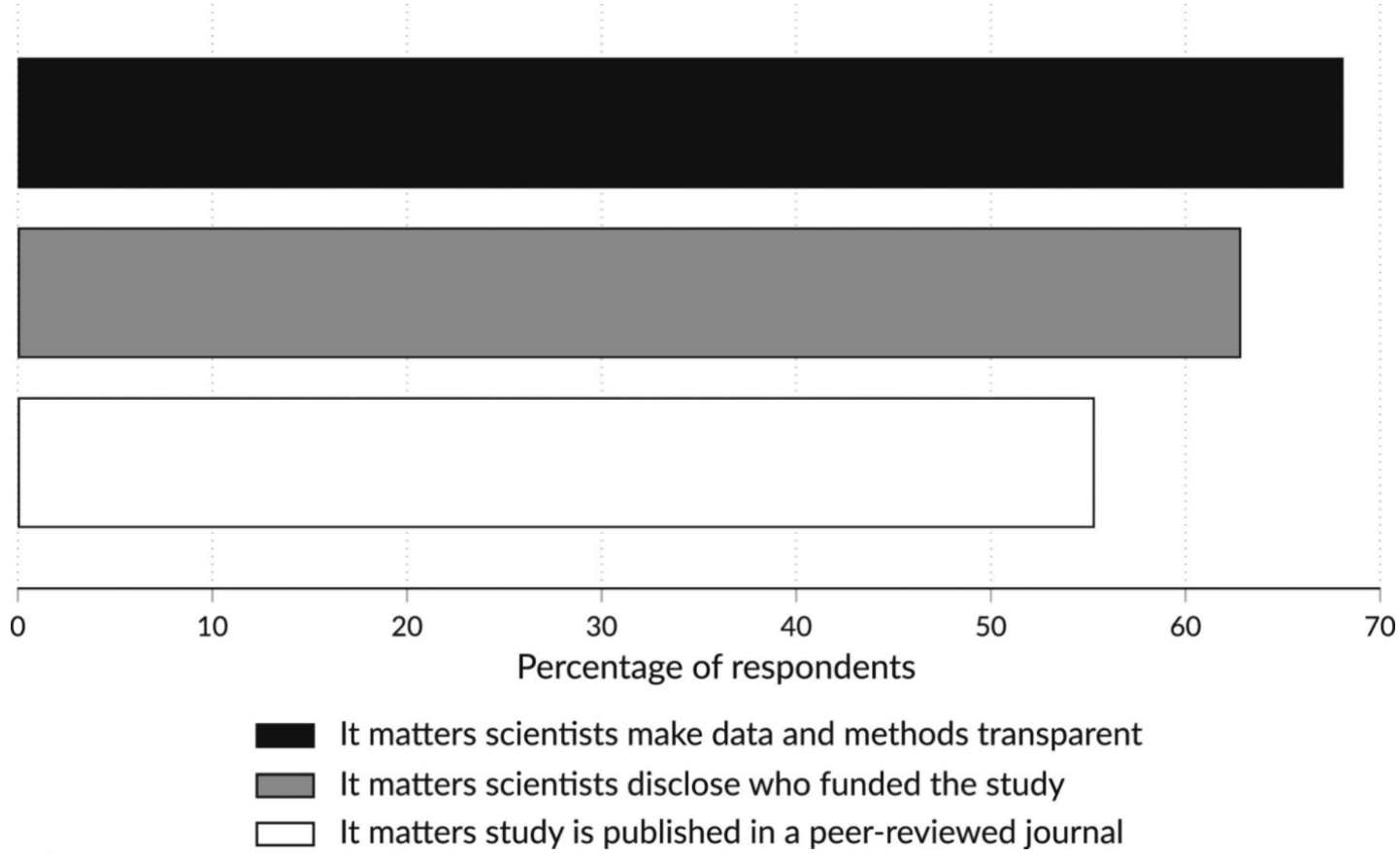
# About me

- Humanities education
- Health science journals
- Managing editor
- Researcher Advocate



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# Why is this an important topic?




**Signaling the trustworthiness of science**
Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Marcia McNutt, Veronique Kiermer, Richard Sever
*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Sep 2019, 116 (39) 19231-19236; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1913039116

# Why is this an important topic?

‘Researchers develop evidence, which helps form policies, which helps develop more evidence to refine, or even change, those policies’

Brad Pollock, *UC Davis Health Department*




‘By the time you read this it will be out of date.’

Photo by Fusion Medical Animation on Unsplash

# Why is this an important topic?




COPE Case taxonomy, https://publicationethics.org/cope-case-taxonomy

# Why is this an important topic?

‘[Peer review is]…slow, expensive, profligate of academic time, highly subjective, prone to bias, easily abused, poor at detecting gross defects, and almost useless for detecting fraud…’

Smith, R. Peer review: reform or revolution? *BMJ* 315 (**1997**): 759–760

**Ethics is the common factor in each of these criticisms – ethics are fundamental to peer review functioning well**

# Why is this an important topic?

‘A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.’



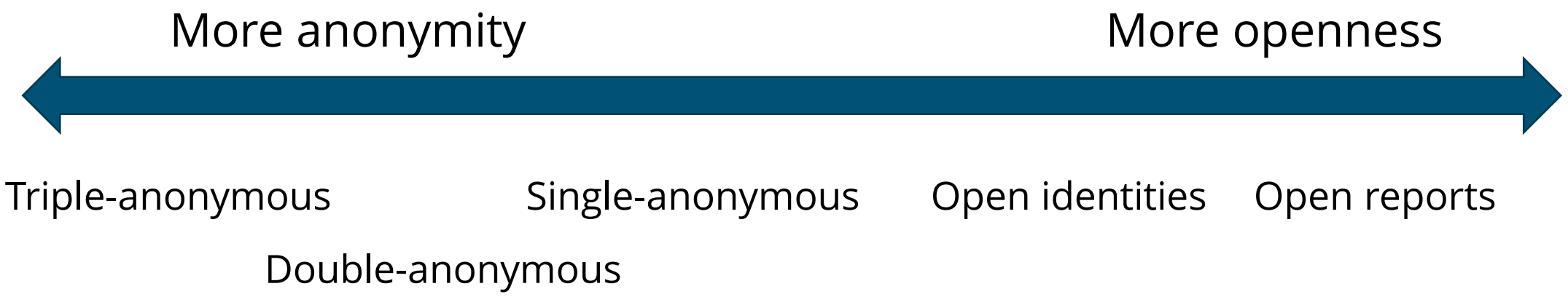
Photo by Shaojie on Unsplash

# Some qualifications

- Scientific research is an iterative process: it is constantly being updated and refined
- Peer review isn't – and cannot be – the final arbiter of 'what is true'
- Peer review helps validate and improve the communication and curation of research
- Peer review supports journal editors in making informed publication decisions about research
- Peer review seeks to improve the quality of an article

What are the different models of peer review?

# **How** peer review is conducted: reducing bias



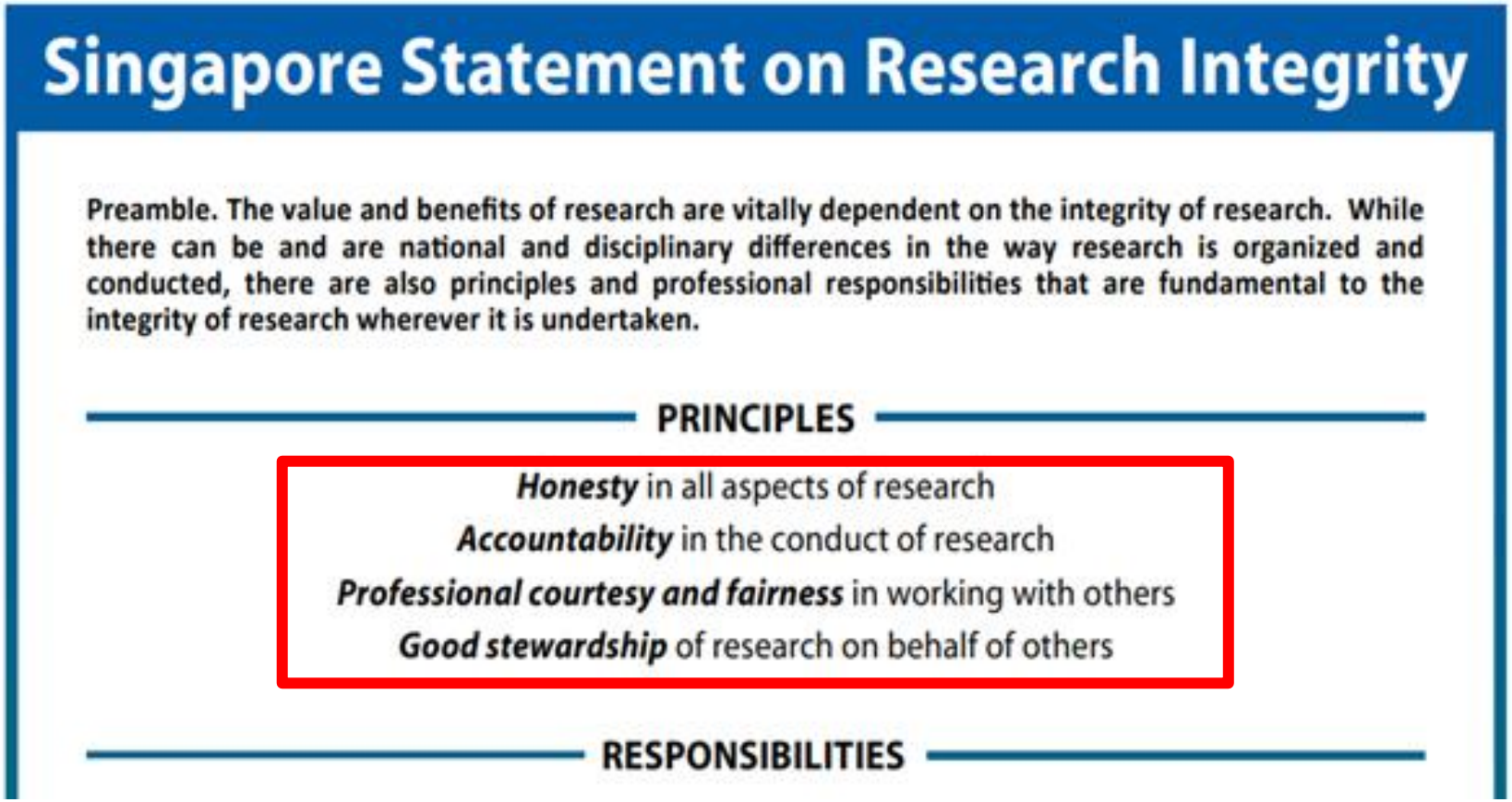
# **When** peer review is conducted: how to be transparent



# Ethics is everyone's responsibility



# Ethics is everyone's responsibility



## Singapore Statement on Research Integrity

**Preamble. The value and benefits of research are vitally dependent on the integrity of research. While there can be and are national and disciplinary differences in the way research is organized and conducted, there are also principles and professional responsibilities that are fundamental to the integrity of research wherever it is undertaken.**

### PRINCIPLES

***Honesty*** in all aspects of research

***Accountability*** in the conduct of research

***Professional courtesy and fairness*** in working with others

***Good stewardship*** of research on behalf of others

### RESPONSIBILITIES

# Ethics is everyone’s responsibility

§8. Peer Review: Researchers should provide **fair, prompt and rigorous** evaluations and **respect confidentiality** when reviewing others' work.

§ 11. Reporting Irresponsible Research Practices: Researchers should **report** to the appropriate authorities any **suspected research misconduct**, including fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, **and other irresponsible research practices** that undermine the trustworthiness of research, such as carelessness, improperly listing authors, failing to report conflicting data, or the use of misleading analytical methods.

*Singapore Statement on Research Integrity*, September 2010
https://wcrif.org/guidance/singapore-statement

# Who is responsible for ethics in peer review?

## The publisher



Photo by Nastya Dulhiier on Unsplash

# What can the publisher do?

## Wiley Best Practice Guidelines

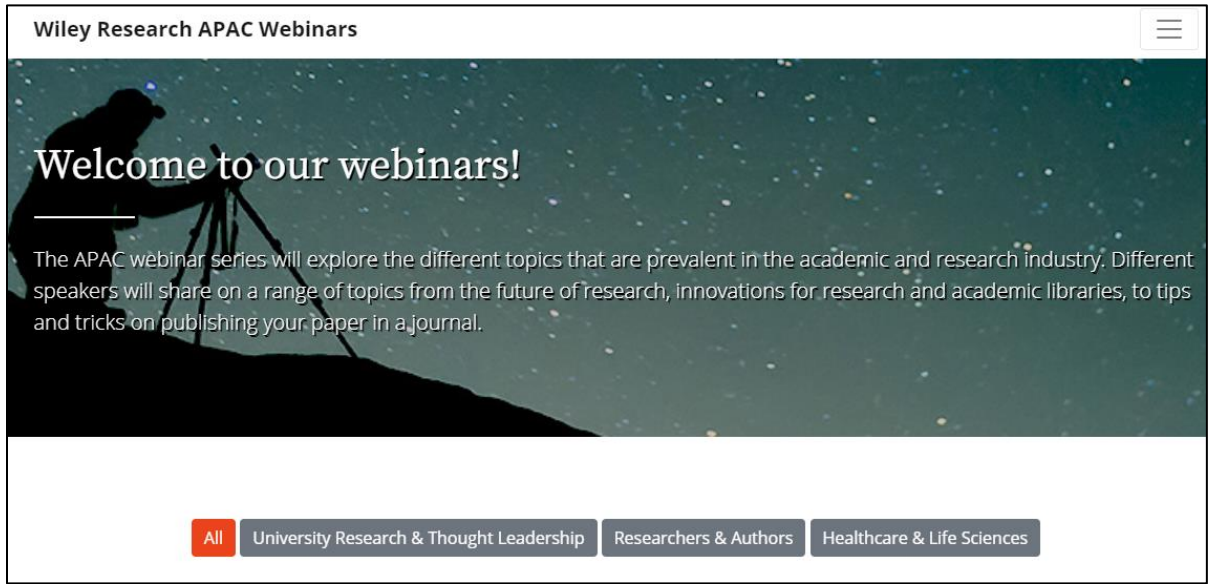
https://authorservices.wiley.com/ethics-guidelines/index.html



# What can the publisher do?

# Guidance and resources

https://webinars.wileyresearch.com/




https://authorservices.wiley.com/Reviewers/journal-reviewers/index.html



# What can the publisher do?

## Training

https://publons.com/academy



# Who is responsible for ethics in peer review?

## The editor



Photo by Remy_Loz on Unsplash

## What can the editor do?

# Wiley Best Practice Guidelines

"Give peer reviewers explicit guidance on their role and responsibilities."

https://authorservices.wiley.com/ethics-guidelines/index.html#15



# What can the editor do?

## Better Peer Review

“What does ‘quality’ mean in peer review?”

https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1222



# What can the editor do?

## Better Peer Review

https://secure.wiley.com/better-peer-review



# What can the editor do?

# Better Peer Review

‘Journals should strive to improve processes in the light of changing community expectations and technological advances’

https://dx.doi.org/10.22541/au.156839988.89111245

## What does better peer review look like? Findings from 132 journals completing a self-assessment exercise

Thomas E. Gaston, Chris Graf, Elisha Morris, Elizabeth Moylan, Sarah Pedder, Michael Willis

**Abstract**

*Aim:* We wanted to understand how well journal teams, comprising editors, managing editors, reviewers and publishers, perform across five Essential Areas of peer review according to a self-assessment of their own editorial and peer review processes. We also wanted to identify and share the best practices that journals use and recognise potential obstacles that could be overcome.

*Methods:* Journals used a Self-Assessment tool to assess their peer review processes by answering questions and giving themselves a quantitative score and providing a qualitative explanation for their rating, across the five ‘Essential Areas’ of Integrity, Ethics, Fairness, Usefulness and Timeliness. Wiley colleagues independently rated the journals to distinguish best practices and identify potential obstacles.

*Results:* We examined the responses of 132 journals which completed the Self-Assessment exercise. Journals tended to rate themselves more highly than the study authors did. The greatest variation in rating between journal self-rating (SA-score) and the study authors’ rating (R-score) was in the Essential Area of Usefulness, with the smallest variation in the area of Ethics. We identified a set of best practices that could help improve peer review in each of the Essential Areas.

*Conclusion:* The Self-Assessment encourages journals to reflect on and change their peer review processes and offers practical guidance on how to do this. They benefit from greater awareness of technical solutions that exist to help them in this. The Self-Assessment also highlights how journals can be inconsistent in the way that their processes operate, with one policy in place for authors and a different or no policy in place for reviewers/editors. Rather than be content with the status quo, journals should strive to improve processes in the light of changing community expectations and technological advances.

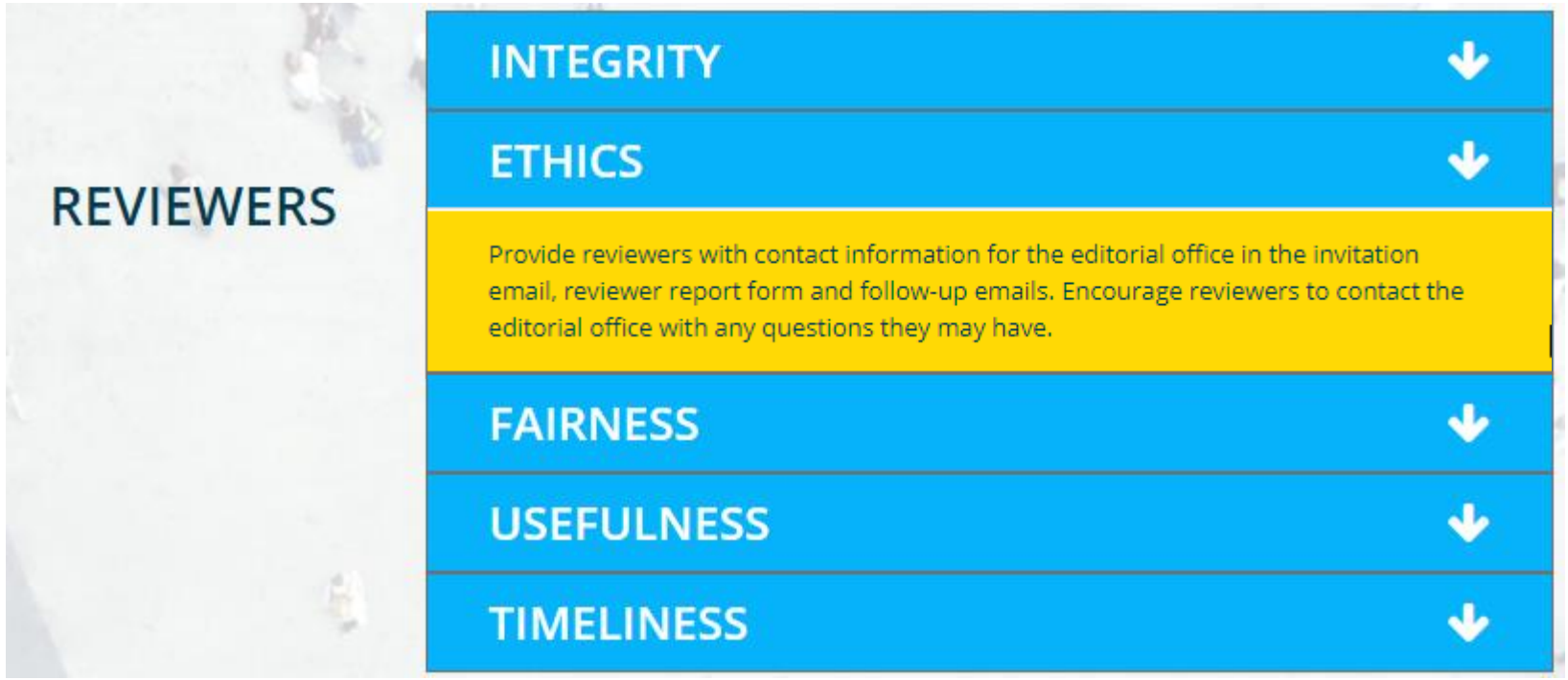
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# What can the editor do?

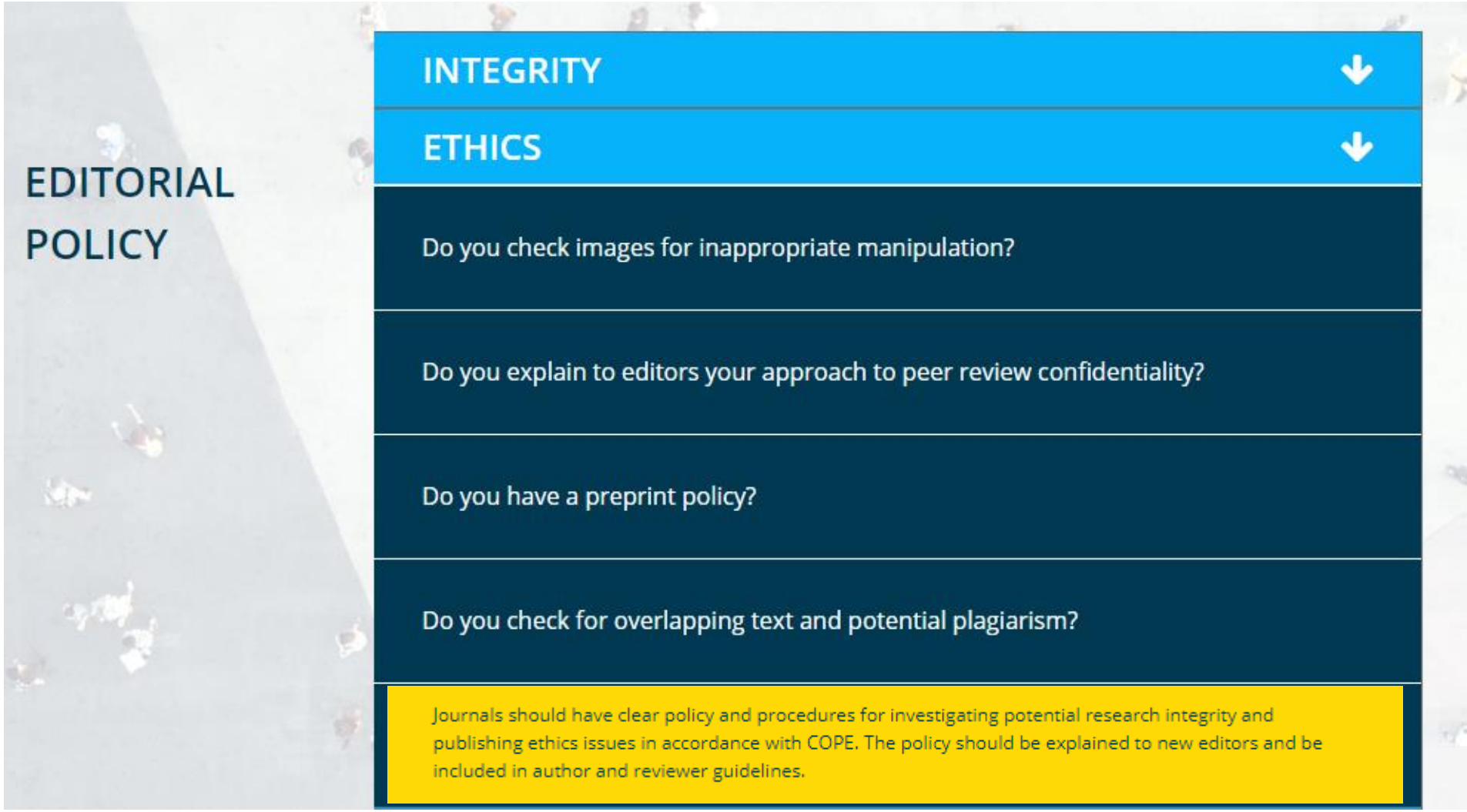
**Essential areas of peer review:**

- Integrity: peer review establishes that the work is reliable and potentially reproducible.
- Ethics: peer review establishes that the work was conducted ethically.
- Fairness: peer review is objective and impartial.
- Usefulness: peer review is constructive and helpful.
- Timeliness: peer review provides timely feedback for authors.

# What can the editor do?



# What can the editor do?



# What can the reviewer do?

## COPE Short Guide to Ethical Editing

https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.8



# What can the editor do?

**COPE Short Guide to Ethical Editing**

‘As the editor, you are responsible for everything published in your journal, and you should therefore take all reasonable steps to ensure the quality of this material.’

‘It is important that you act politely, fairly but firmly at all times.’

# What can the editor do?

- http://www.icmje.org/




- https://www.equator-network.org/



# Who is responsible for ethics in peer review?

## The reviewer



Photo by Stephen Kraakmo on Unsplash

# What can the reviewer do?

**Tell the editor about yourself**

- What is your affiliation?
  - *Helps avoid conflicts of interest*
  - *Helps editor find diverse pool of reviewers*
- What are your areas of expertise?
  - *Reassures editor and author you have subject knowledge*
- Do you have a CV, web page or Publons profile?
  - *Informs editor about your level of experience*

# What can the reviewer do?

**Think about the review process**

- Are you available to review?
  - *Helps avoid delays and set expectations for editor and author*
- Do you have a conflict of interest with the author (think of affiliation and/or collaboration)?
  - *Helps avoid bias and ensures integrity*
- Do you understand the journal's peer review process?
  - *Helps ensure appropriate anonymity and/or transparency*
- Do you plan to co-review with another reviewer?
  - *Makes the review process transparent*

# What can the reviewer do?

**Think about the content of your review**

- Do you have ethical concerns about the research or content?
  - *Think about how the research was conducted and how it is presented*
- Have you assessed all of the article's content?
  - *Ensures the work is judged fairly*
- Have you written your comments constructively?
  - *Provides useful feedback for authors to help them improve their work*

## What can the reviewer do?

# Academic kindness

‘Getting peer reviews back often feels like getting kicked in the gut’

‘Reviewers [should be]…. allies of the authors rather than (as can happen) adversaries.’

https://svpow.com/2021/03/09/good-experiences-of-peer-review-at-qeios/




https://www.wiley.com/network/archive/do-to-others-as-you-would-have-them-do-to-you-how-can-editors-foster-academic-kindness-in-peer-review

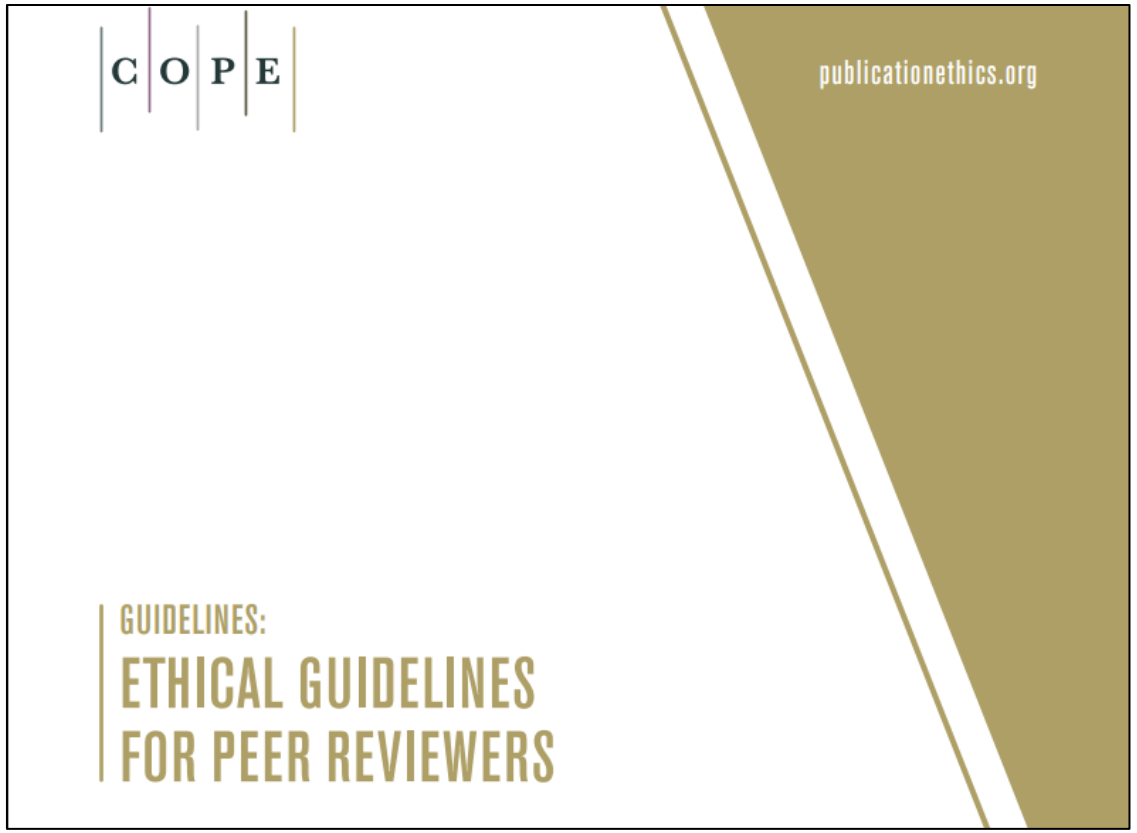
# What can the reviewer do?

## COPE Ethical Guidelines

Also available in Chinese and Latin American Spanish

https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.9

COPE website:
https://publicationethics.org/



# Who is responsible for ethics in peer review?

## The author

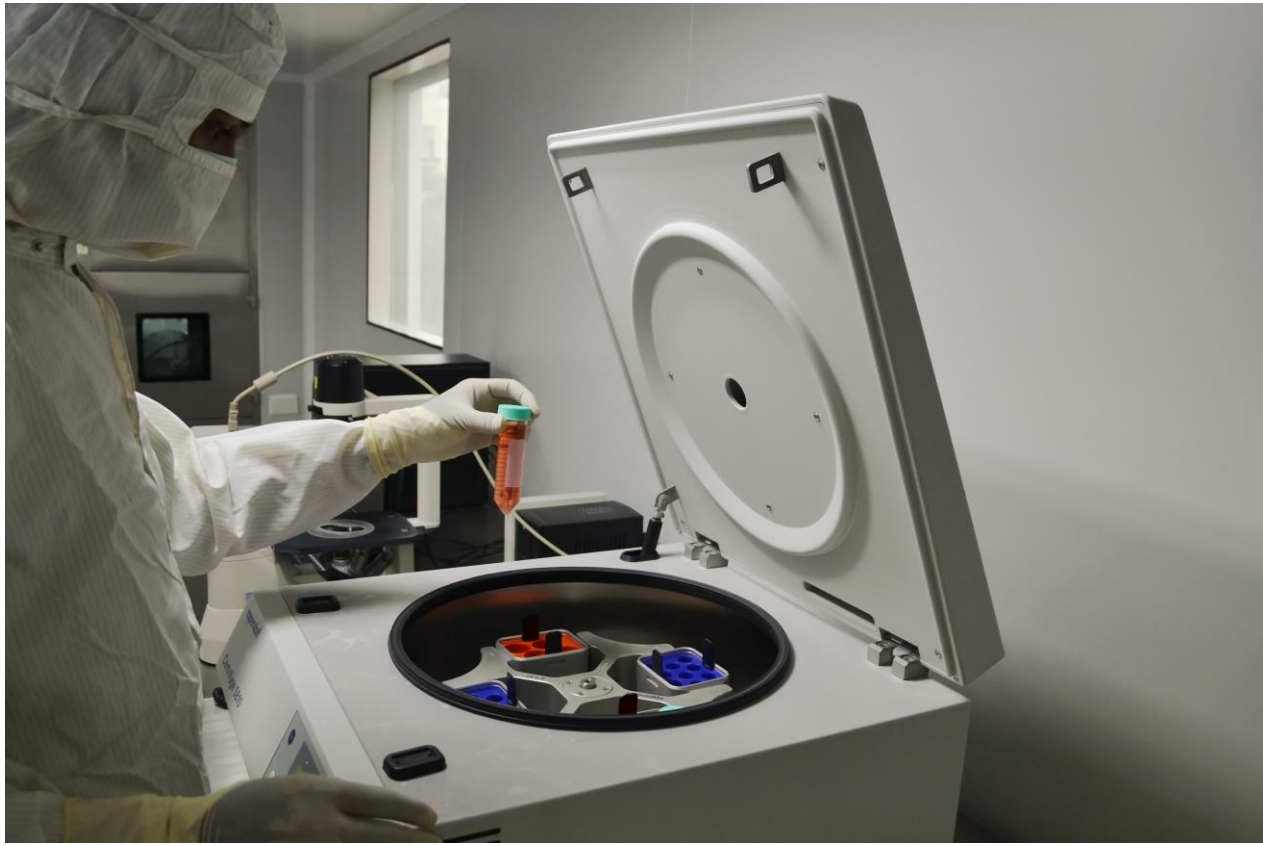


Photo by Satheesh Sankaran on Unsplash

# What can the author do?

**‘Honesty in all aspects of research’**

- Is it your own work?
- Has the research been reported accurately and truthfully?
- Have you obtained ethical approval and patient consent?
- Have you declared relevant conflicts of interest?
- Have you declared sources of funding?
- Have you obtained all necessary permissions?
- Have all authors and contributors been named and acknowledged, and are they aware of the submission?

# What can the author do?

**‘Help! I think I have been the victim of unethical treatment.’**

‘Allegations of suspected misconduct that have specific, detailed evidence to support the claim should be investigated appropriately, whether they are raised anonymously or by named “whistle blowers.”’

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijcp.12557

# We’re all in this together





# Thank you for attending today.


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