

# ASA-CSSA-SSSA Editorial Policies

The American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America (which will be referred to hereafter as either the Societies, the three societies, or ASA–CSSA–SSSA) publish information concerning all aspects of the sciences they represent. Their extensive publishing activities offer opportunities for agricultural science-related professionals to communicate findings to colleagues and to larger, more general audiences.

The *Publications Handbook and Style Manual* (<https://www.soils.org/publications/style>) serves as a guide for authors who wish to prepare manuscripts and other material for submission to and publication by the Societies and for editors in evaluating the submitted material.

The three societies publish eight journals, *Agronomy Journal*, *Crop Science*, *Soil Science Society of America Journal*, *Vadose Zone Journal*, *Journal of Environmental Quality*, *Natural Sciences Education*, *The Plant Genome* and the *Journal of Plant Registration*. The three societies also publish *Soil Horizons*, *Agronomy Monographs*, the SSSA Book Series, individual and joint Special Publication series, journal supplements, and other miscellaneous books, papers, booklets, and pamphlets. Other titles, the Annual Meetings Abstracts, the monthly membership magazine *CSA News* and the bimonthly *Crops and Soils* magazine, are edited and published by the Societies' Headquarters staff and will not be discussed here.

The general editorial policies and practices of the three societies are determined by the respective boards of directors, whose members are elected by a vote of the membership of each Society. The boards of directors of the three societies have delegated the responsibilities for review of manuscripts and the production of publications to the editors-in-chief, editors, editorial boards and committees, and to a full-time staff at the Societies' Headquarters office.

Day-to-day procedures and practices have evolved through the years and are still changing. Much of the record keeping and all of the printing, production, and distribution of the publications are coordinated through the Societies' Headquarters office.

## Supplemental Materials

Supplemental material is published online by the Societies'. Please contact the managing editor for the current guidelines.

## Record Retention

At the 2003 annual meeting of the ACS321 Editorial Policy Coordination Committee, a policy was passed regarding publication records. It was moved that official publication records be archived for three years from the receipt of the manuscript for all publications.

## Prior Publication

At the 2003 annual meeting of the ACS321 Editorial Policy Coordination Committee, a policy was passed regarding prior publication. It is not allowable for authors to post their articles on a website before the article is published in one of our journals.

## Accepting or Rejecting a Paper

The policy of the Societies is that no scientific paper may be published in any of their journals, books, or other scholarly publications unless two unbiased professional scientists agree the paper is acceptable. Similarly, no scientific paper submitted for review may be rejected by one of the scholarly publications unless two unbiased professional scientists agree to that rejection. In rare instances, those scientists may be two of the following: the journal's editor, one technical editor, or one associate editor.

More likely, those who agree to the decision will be a combination of one or more volunteer reviewers, one of the journal's associate editors, and (depending on the journal) also a technical editor or the journal's editor.

All scientist–editor members of editorial boards are expected to exercise professional judgment, not simply count ballots cast by volunteer reviewers.

## Obtaining Anonymous Reviews

The three societies have a policy of keeping the reviewers anonymous from authors and from each other. Some of the journals also keep the names of the authors anonymous from the reviewers.

Occasionally, a reviewer will ask an editorial board member to reveal his or her name to the author. Such requests must always be declined. Similarly, remove any reviewer (contact) information, electronic or otherwise, from reviews before forwarding them to the author(s).

There is, of course, no way that ASA–CSSA–SSSA can (or should) prevent that reviewer from contacting the author(s) after the paper is published and saying, "I want you to know that I was a reviewer for your paper."

## Policy For Appeal Of Manuscript Review

The Tri-Societies as a scientific publisher must make judgments about the correctness and relevance of manuscripts under consideration for publication. The Societies rely on qualified volunteers to review manuscripts and to serve on editorial boards to make these editorial decisions and to provide feedback to authors. In the vast majority of cases, this process works smoothly.

Should an author feel that the process was implemented incorrectly or that a review was biased, or poorly done, the

author should first inform the Editor of that journal, and attempt to resolve the concern at that level. If the concern is not resolved, the author may appeal the decision to the Editors-in-Chief. Their decision will be final.

All volunteers involved in evaluating a manuscript will be assumed to have acted in an appropriate and professional manner unless and until it is demonstrated to be otherwise. The Societies' volunteers will keep all those involved in an appeal informed of the process, and will always be cognizant that such investigations are difficult for all concerned, and will use their best judgment regarding tact and confidentiality.

### ***Natural Sciences Education***

The Case Study Publication Policy and Computer Software Publication Policy are both available in Appendix C of the *Publications Handbook and Style Manual*.

### **Statement of Ethics for Authors**

As authors, we seek to advance knowledge in the sciences associated with our journals. We uphold fair and professional conduct in relation to our manuscripts and papers.

Contributors to publications of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America, whether members or not, agree to the following ethical guidelines<sup>†</sup>, for the advancement of our sciences and our scientific communities:

1. Uphold the highest standards of scientific investigation and professional comportment, and an uncompromising commitment to the advancement of knowledge.
2. Honor the rights and accomplishments of others and properly credit the work and ideas of others.
3. Strive to avoid conflicts of interest.
4. Demonstrate social responsibility in scientific and professional practice, by considering whom their scientific and professional activities benefit, and whom they neglect.
5. Provide honest and impartial advice on subjects about which they are informed and qualified.
6. As mentors of the next generation of scientific and professional leaders, strive to instill these ethical standards in students at all educational levels.

### **Use of Human Subjects or Animals in Research**

Only investigations that have followed high standards for the humane care and use of animals in research will be reported in ASA, CSSA, and SSSA journals. Authors of manuscripts describing research involving human subjects or animal experimentation must obtain review and approval (or review and waiver) from their Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), as appropriate, prior to manuscript submission. Authors of manuscripts that describe multisite research must obtain approval from each institution's IRB or IACUC, as appropriate. Documentation of IRB or IACUC status must be made available upon request. In the event that institutional review boards or

committees do not exist, the authors must ensure that their research is carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, as revised in 2013 (<http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/>). A statement of IRB or IACUC approval or waiver (and reason for waiver) or a statement of adherence to the Declaration of Helsinki must be included in the Materials and Methods section.

The following U.S. Government principles should be adhered to for animal research (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/references/PHSPolicyLabAnimals.pdf>):

- The transportation, care, and use of animals should be in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act (7 U.S.C. 2131 et seq.) and other applicable Federal laws, guidelines, and policies.\*
- Procedures involving animals should be designed and performed with due consideration of their relevance to human or animal health, the advancement of knowledge, or the good of society.
- The animals selected for a procedure should be of an appropriate species and quality and the minimum number required to obtain valid results. Methods such as mathematical models, computer simulation, and in vitro biological systems should be considered.
- Proper use of animals, including the avoidance or minimization of discomfort, distress, and pain when consistent with sound scientific practices, is imperative. Unless the contrary is established, investigators should consider that procedures that cause pain or distress in human beings may cause pain or distress in other animals.
- Procedures with animals that may cause more than momentary or slight pain or distress should be performed with appropriate sedation, analgesia, or anesthesia. Surgical or other painful procedures should not be performed on unanesthetized animals paralyzed by chemical agents.

### **Informed Consent**

All individuals have rights that are not to be infringed. For example, individual participants in studies have the right to decide what happens to the (identifiable) personal data gathered, to what they have said during a study or interview, as well as to any photograph that was taken.

Hence it is important that all participants gave their informed consent in writing prior to inclusion in the study. Identifying details (names, dates of birth, identity numbers and other information) of the participants that were studied should not be published in written descriptions, photographs, and genetic profiles unless the information is essential for scientific purposes and the participant (or parent or guardian if the participant is incapable) gave written informed consent for

publication. Complete anonymity is difficult to achieve in some cases, and informed consent should be obtained if there is any doubt. Complete guidelines for informed consent can be found in section 46.117 of Federal Regulations document 45 CFR 46, Human Subjects Research (<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html>).

### Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest in publishing can be defined as conditions in which an individual holds conflicting or competing interests that could bias editorial decisions. Conflicts of interest may be only potential or perceived, or they may be factual. Personal, political, financial, academic, or religious considerations can affect objectivity in numerous ways.

Editors, authors, and reviewers must agree to this policy, and must disclose any conflict-of-interest or competing interest on our online form attached to the ManuscriptCentral Submission system. It is also important to recognize that an Editor and/or reviewer can be impartial while nonetheless being in conflict of interest. Since the perception of conflict of interest is detrimental to a journal's reputation, avoiding even the perception of conflict of interest should be a priority.

One challenge for journals is to recognize the potential for biases arising from conflicts of interest in the publishing process and to take appropriate action when biases are likely. Some specific types of conflict of interest are mentioned below.

- **Personal conflicts.** Editors should avoid making decisions on manuscripts that conflict with their own interest, such as those submitted from their department or by research collaborators, co-authors, competitors, or those addressing an issue in which they stand to gain financially (e.g., stock in a company whose product is discussed in the article), within the past five years. If there is a perceived or actual conflict of interest, editors should delegate handling of any decision to other editors with decision-making responsibility. Also, editors should submit their own manuscripts to the journal only if full masking of the process can be ensured (e.g., anonymity of the peer reviewers and lack of access to records of their own manuscript). Editorials and/or opinion pieces are an exception to this rule.
- **Financial conflicts.** The most evident type of potential conflict of financial interest arises when an individual or organization may benefit financially from a decision to publish or to reject a manuscript. Financial conflicts may include salary, grants from a company with an interest in the results, honoraria, stock or equity interests, and intellectual property rights (patents, royalties, and copyrights). Some examples of potential

direct and indirect financial conflicts of interest that should be avoided are given below.

**Direct:** An editor, author, or reviewer is reporting or considering a study involving a specific commercial product while he or she holds equity positions or stock options in the company making the product and thus has the potential to realize direct financial gain if the assessment is favorable.

**Direct:** A reviewer gains key knowledge by evaluating a competing research team's work and uses it prior to the publication of the work but does not cite it in his/her own patent application.

**Indirect:** An individual involved in the publication process is employed by an organization that would obtain some advantage from a favorable product-related publication or may receive compensation if a product does well as a result of a favorable report published in the journal. Similarly, an author of an editorial commenting on the importance of a research article may minimize positive findings if he or she has been a consultant to a company selling competing products.

**Indirect:** When an investigator studies the product of a commercial enterprise from which the investigator has received monies previously (e.g., consulting fees, honoraria, or speaking fees), the situation differs slightly. In such case, there is no direct relationship between the evaluation and a personal gain the investigator may anticipate. Nevertheless, previously received payments could conceivably influence the researcher's opinion; therefore, they must be regarded as a potential conflict of interest and should be disclosed.

- **Nonfinancial conflicts.** Other nonfinancial conflicts of interest should also be avoided or disclosed. Some of these include personal, political, academic, and religious conflicts. Examples are listed below.
  - A reviewer evaluating a manuscript reporting research results similar to results he or she is preparing to submit for publication might be tempted to delay the review until his or her manuscript is accepted or might be unduly influenced by the concepts or hypotheses in his or her ongoing and unpublished research.
  - A reviewer with strong feelings on a controversial topic might be partial to or biased against a manuscript on the topic and want to publish or reject it regardless of scientific merit.
  - An editor chairing a department might struggle to reach an objective decision about a manuscript submitted by a member of his or her faculty because of his or her commitment

to the academic advancement of those researchers.

## Conflict of Interest Disclosure

**Explanation and enforcement of authorship disclosure.** The Editorial Boards of the various Society journals will be responsible for establishing the authorship criteria guidelines for their journals. The authorship criteria will be published (in print and/or electronic media), and it will then be the responsibility of the various Society journals to enforce these standards by collecting relevant documentation from authors.

Journals will require everyone involved in the publication process (i.e., editors, reviewers, editorial board members, editorial staff, and authors) to sign a general conflict of interest statement. The intent of disclosure is to allow others to make an informed decision about the existence and impact of potential conflicts of interest or bias, including the necessity for recusal or disqualification under extraordinary circumstances. Editors are better equipped to make informed decisions of potential biases if they have full knowledge of all the circumstances, and readers and reviewers have more information to interpret the work when there is a public disclosure. However, mandatory disclosure of actual or perceived conflicts may not allow a manuscript to be judged solely on its scientific merits and may introduce prejudice. Editors and reviewers must be aware of this possibility.

- **Author disclosures.** Authors are required to disclose all personal, financial (in excess of \$1000), and other relationships they may have with the manufacturer of any product mentioned in the manuscript or with the manufacturers of competing products. Society journals will keep disclosed conflicts of interest confidential during the peer review process. This allows the editor to consider the potential conflicts after the scientific merit is assessed.
- **Reviewer disclosures.** In most instances, when a reviewer indicates a conflict-of-interest, or competing interests, the editor will request that reviewer declines to comment on the manuscript. However, if a reviewer is a colleague of the author or the editor, but believes that he or she can provide an objective review, the editor may allow the practice. Reviewers will be asked to sign the same conflict of interest disclosure form, as authors and editors do.

## Citation Manipulation

Most metrics of scholarly performance, including the Journal Impact Factor, are based on citations to published articles. This may generate strong temptation to inappropriately increase citations, something that is referred to as citation manipulation or citation gaming.

Citation manipulation refers to any systematic practice that inappropriately pressures authors to cite material with the primary goal of boosting citation rates. The Societies consider all such practices unacceptable.

The following forms of citation manipulation (for the purpose of increasing citation rates) are known to exist:

- **Coercion.** At some point during the peer-review process, editors (or anyone else involved in the process) request that authors add citations from their own journal (or a journal from the same publisher).
- **Editorials.** Editors write editorials in which a disproportionate number of articles from their own journal are cited.
- **Reviewers.** Reviewers suggesting citations of their own work.
- **Self-citation.** Authors cite disproportionately large numbers of their own articles in all or most of their publications.
- **Citation swapping.** A group of colleagues (perhaps students or research associates of a particular researcher) agrees to preferentially and regularly cite each other's articles in all or most of their publications.

Anybody involved in the peer-review process can become a party to citation manipulation. Therefore, it is every participant's responsibility to judge how reasonable such requests are. If citation manipulation is suspected, it should be brought to the attention of the editor, publisher, or other accountable party.

In addition, authors should be aware of and abide by the following specific policies‡:

**Obtaining Consent to Submit:** The submitting author should have sent each living co-author a draft copy of the manuscript and have obtained the co-author's assent to coauthorship of it.

**Plagiarism Screening:** Authors, be aware that all papers are screened for plagiarism. Our software product evaluates papers to find significant duplication. If there appears to be major repetition from other sources, we will forward those papers to the Journal Editor for further evaluation and action if warranted.

**Prior Publication Policy:** Papers submitted to the Journal must be original research, unpublished and not considered for publication elsewhere. Do not post your article on a website as this constitutes prior publication."

**Recommendations for Professional Conduct:** Do not duplicate material from others' manuscripts or papers or from your own published papers. If similar information is needed in the Materials and Methods section, summarize, and cite the

earlier paper rather than repeating verbatim. Do not add or subtract authors without consent of all authors for the manuscript. Do not post papers on websites until they are published by the journal. These websites include university websites that publish theses and dissertations; ask them to delay posting until the paper is published by the journal. Be courteous and professional as an author.

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† These Guidelines were originally adopted and published as the American Society of Agronomy Statement of Ethics.

‡ These statements were originally published as policies on our manuscript submission websites.

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