



Publication Integrity and Ethics

PIE (π)

P.I.E. Guidelines for Editors-in-Chief



Practice Guidelines



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Introduction

PIE guidelines put forth for the Editor-in-chief set parameters of an acceptable ethical conduct in publishing. Our aim is to proffer comprehensive guidance, lucid definitions, and firm expectations of standard in responsible editorial behaviour. The Editor-in-chief has the vital and ultimate duty of ensuring every publication meets these guidelines, and that work is of a sufficient quality before being released to the public.

PIE encourages all individuals involved in the publishing business to register with the organisation and comply with its guidelines. This proposition is particularly apparent for those in positions of authority. By promoting an atmosphere of ethical conduct from the topmost level, it is hoped an ethical benchmark in publishing will be encouraged which filters through the entire industry.

An editor-in-chief should not only become a member of PIE, but also respect the guidelines and cultivate them in their everyday working environment. As such, formulating and filing complaints against any individual or publication who fails to comply with the ethical rules and recommendations is imperative.

The role of the editor-in-chief incorporates advising their team to support and follow the guidelines and furthermore register with the organisation. Every member must be fully aware of the correct code of conduct, whereby privacy is appreciated, intellectual property is protected, and copyright law is respected.

Fostering integrity throughout

1 Expected Standards

1.1 Editors-in-chief are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that articles, news reports, and opinions published within the pages of the journal they supervise are informative in nature, well balanced, and fair.

1.2 Taking responsibility for all material contained within their publication is expected of an editor-in-chief, from commencement of their position.

They should be ready to answer any question put forth and have the relevant documentation and evidence to back up their response.

1.3 Editors should never deliberately misinform their readers for the expedience of an agenda, discourse, proposition, or other aspect hidden from the reader. Rumours, unconfirmed reports, and news should be identified as such.

1.4 As soon as an editor-in-chief becomes aware of any errors and/or inaccuracies in published materials, they must promptly correct them whether a complaint has been formulated against them or not, according to the PIE guidelines.

1.5 Consideration of public sentiment and sensibility should always be a paramount factor before proffering information of a possibly inflammatory nature. Offensive materials include all texts and images that put inequitable emphasis on gender, race, religion, disability, or other sensitive topics.

1.6 Shortfalls, conflicting data, or limitations should never be omitted from the published material and be clearly defined within the text to ensure a balanced and accurate representation of the facts.

1.7 Editors-in-chief have the duty of consistently ensuring that individual privacy is respected and that the publication gives them the opportunity of a balanced response if necessary.

1.8 Journalistic investigations obtained by breach of confidence or other unfair means should not be released to the public. Investigations must be also just, balanced, and informative in nature.

1.9 As long as relevant data and information is not misrepresented or suppressed, publications are free to advocate their own views and opinions. Readers, however, must be aware of what is presented as fact, what is presented as opinion, and what is purely fictional. It must be also be clearly highlighted where there have been any data manipulations, as well as limitations, inconsistencies, and/or incongruities.

1.10 Submitted materials that are found to be in breach of any ethical guideline regarding clinical trials involving humans and animals should be rejected. An approval from a recognised ethics committee, written confirmation from test subjects, and paperwork showing stringent evidence of adherence to all current legislation must be sought. All data must be kept confidential and risk assessment should be encouraged upon potential breaches of security.

1.11 If errors such as the above are signalled by third party individuals, editors-in-chief must take immediate action and correct them by publishing the adjudication swiftly, whether the complaints were formulated directly or through the PIE complaint system.

2 Conflicting interests

2.1 As far as is possible, an editor-in-chief should consider themselves as an independent figure. As such, written confirmation from the publications' owner should be sought before the acceptance of a job offer whereby this stipulation is clearly stated, without ambiguity and in plain English.

2.2 An editor-in-chief should never make any editorial decision based on financial, political, ideological, or other such pressure from an outside agent. Decisions must be made predominantly on the basis that content within their publications is accurate, honest, and free from conflicting influence.

2.3 Insistence upon a full list of possible conflicts from authors must be stipulated before publication. In addition, systems to identify and curtail any influences within the editorial or reviewer team are a vital necessity, as is the promotion of an independent working environment that is founded on ethical integrity.

2.4 It is the duty of the editor-in-chief to ascertain, detail, and disclose all financial contributions to a publication clearly in the content of the text.

2.5 An editor-in-chief must never pressurise authors, editorial board members, reviewers, or publishers into actions unconnected or opposite to raising the integrity, honesty, and accuracy of a publication. This can include citing specific publications, political wrangling, or financial pressures, along with any other conflicting interest.

2.6 Agreements whereby a sponsor or financial contributor can repress unflattering data or conclusions within the published material must never be entered. The only case where this is necessary is when the information is perceived to be a potential national security risk and is therefore classified by a governmental body.

2.7 The editor-in-chief needs to ensure that their team members comply with all ethical guidelines in order to foster an environment of integrity, objectivity, and independence at all times. Cases of gross misconduct must be dealt with accordingly.

2.8 As far as is possible, an editor-in-chief should strive to separate financial considerations from the quality of the content they publish. Focus should instead be put on being aware of the publications release schedule and trying to spread their published literature to the widest possible audience for the fairest price.

3 Responsibility

3.1 Editors-in-chief must respect personal privacy and encourage the staff under them to gather personal information only if it is in the best interest of the readers. While doing research, editors and authors should not intrude the privacy of individuals. If they are public figures, the intrusion must be limited to their public duties and not their personal and private lives.

3.2 Personal and sensitive information should only be used for the purpose of which it was collected. Individuals who provide information are entitled to anonymity, and all data protection laws must be respected in full.

3.3 The editor-in-chief must ensure that the publication under their jurisdiction is constantly aiming to improve, and providing new, valuable contributions to specific areas or field of study. All published material should be high quality, informative in nature, balanced, and grammatically and politically correct.

3.4 It is vital that the editor-in-chief engenders a working environment that discourages gift and ghost authorship.

3.5 An accurate account of the contributions made by each author on a collaborative project must be recorded in full. If changes are made at any point through the project, all authors must first be notified. Conflicts can be avoided if all is set out clearly at the start of a project and authors are given detailed documentation. Any conflicts on authorship issues can be forwarded to PIE for arbitration.

3.6 If a peer reviewer decides there are certain things that must be corrected or modified, the changes are to be applied before the article is published. If the editor-in-chief decides to deviate from the peer-reviewer's recommendations, the changes have to be justified and balanced.

3.7 Editors-in-chief have the duty of guiding and training their staff and peer-reviewers. They must be constantly updated with news and requirements regarding their duties; any queries should be dealt with to the satisfaction of both the editor and the reviewer.

3.8 Unless the editor-in-chief operates an open review system, the identity of peer-reviewers must be protected. All the guidelines and regulations related to the peer-review work must be linked to the PIE guidelines.

3.9 Any image, quote, case study, report, or other such article used in a publication should have a consent form application before publication. Within this stipulation is the need for outlining the extent and role the article will play in the content of the publication.

3.10 In general, there is no rule obliging or making the editor-in-chief responsible for submitting articles or documents to lawyers in court cases.

4 Retraction guidelines

There are a number of subtle nuances for an editor-in-chief to consider before issuing a retraction order on a publication. Below are the PIE guidelines on issuing such an order, and the considerations that must be taken into account. The decree issuing the retraction should include as much detail as possible, and list the reasons, evidence, and the person or organisation retracting the article. Vigilance of any potentially libellous remarks is pivotal, and consulting a lawyer may be needed if there are any uncertainties.

4.1 The editor-in-chief should consider the immediate retraction of a publication upon receiving information pertaining to: evidence of unreliable findings, redundant publication whereby the content has been published elsewhere, plagiarism, and reports of unethical research. Retractions should be saved for publications that are flawed to such an extent their contents are deemed to be misleading and erroneous.

4.2 The editor-in-chief should consider expressing concern at: inconclusive evidence of author misconduct, unreliable findings that are not investigated by the author's institution, the belief that an investigation would not be fair or ethical, or the findings to clarify a situation are far from becoming available.

4.3 Corrections should be issued either if small errors are found, or upon the revelation that an author has not been accredited their due for work they contributed.

4.4 If a retraction is recommended by the PIE sub-committee then the corrections must be clearly visible to the reader. Regardless of whether there has been a recognised complaint, all inaccuracies and mistakes should be rectified by the editor as soon as they come to light.



5 Complaints against the publication and/or editorial team members

Editors-in-chief should strive to stimulate debate with new and interesting publications. This will often entail comments, complaints, and disagreements, which are in fact a great sign that the work is being taken note of. Dealing with any concerns must however be performed in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner, following the correct procedural guidelines set out by PIE.

5.1 Editors-in-chief have to act immediately if they are aware of misconduct and other ethical problems relating to the publishing sector as a whole.

5.2 If complaints were formulated through PIE, editors must follow the PIE guidelines and submit to PIE’s representatives all the information and data related to the complaint. In addition, previously exchanged correspondence during the first part of the process must be made available in full.

5.3 Complaints formulated directly against the publication should be treated as urgent. The editor-in-chief must do their best to correct any problems signalled by third party individuals and issue a response as soon as is viable.

5.4 Any complaints must be relayed to the author at once in order to get a direct response.

5.5 Upon a complaint being referred to the PIE Council sub-committee, official representatives of the organisation will evaluate the situation and decide what the required actions will be. This may include further investigations, whereby both parties will be informed and required to provide evidence of all correspondence up to the point of PIE’s intervention.

There are two possible outcomes regarding PIE arbitration:

- (1) The PIE sub-committee decides that the complaint was dealt with to the satisfaction of both sides and prescribes to the set guidelines of ethical conduct and good practice.
- (2) The PIE sub-committee decides that additional investigations are required, providing a full report advising both sides of the next step in the process.

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