

# Fixing Errors in a Published Paper: Tips for Authors

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Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/handling-errors-published-paper-tips-authors/>



Mistakes in [academic publishing](#) happen for all sorts of reasons. They range from simple typographic errors to willful manipulation of findings or results. The way in which these errors are handled [depends largely on](#) their severity or magnitude and whether they were intentional. Tips for authors as they respond to a mistake in a published paper will be based upon the classification of the error.

## Mistakes in Published Paper

- Unintentional errors include those associated with data collection or classification, statistical analysis, information that cannot be verified by a peer reviewer, typographical errors and misspellings, or labeling a figure as “on the right” or “on the left” when the opposite is true.
- Essentially, unintentional errors comprise mistakes that were not willful on the part of the author or publisher and do not compromise the outcomes of the research.
- Intentional errors constitute academic misconduct and include concurrent submission of a single paper to multiple journals, conflicts of interest, fabrication or manipulation of data, noncompliance with research protocols, plagiarism, and dividing a manuscript into several small papers (“salami slicing”).

- [Academic misconduct](#) “affects the publication record or the scientific integrity of the paper, or the reputation of the authors or the journal.”

## Types of Mistakes

For peer-reviewed content, error types can be categorized as:

- **Erratum**—If a significant error is made by the journal that may affect the work or reputation of authors, the notification released is called erratum. **Corrigendum** – If a significant error is made by the author(s), then all the authors must approve and sign the corrigenda (corrections document) or the journal must be informed of their dissenting opinions.
- **Retraction** – If the results are found invalid, all coauthor(s) must sign a retraction that explains the error and how it affected the conclusions. This will be submitted for publication and is the most consequential error type.
- **Addendum** – If any additional information about a paper is published, then it can include an *Editorial Expression of Concern*. It is attached to those papers that editorial staff feel require additional explanation in order to be understood.

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## How to Correct Mistake in a Published Paper?

The response to a published error will depend upon the nature of the error and the individual or organization calling attention to the problem. Typically, those who advise a journal of potential problems with a published paper are readers/other researchers, authors, editors, publishers/journal owners, and members of the organization or institution from which the work was produced (universities and research labs).

In essence, two parties must respond to an error in a published paper: the author(s) and journal editors. Let's start with journal editors. The assessments can be made on a case-by-case basis. For example, following can be considered by editors faced with a mistake in a published paper:

- What is the nature of the correction request?
- Who is making the request?
- Who will write the correction?
- What wording should be used for the correction?
- When should the correction be published?
- When to remove the retracted article the online site?
- When is it acceptable to alter the HTML version of a published article?
- Is there a statute of limitations for publication of errata and/or retractions?
- Can the original (or different) authors republish findings of a paper that has been retracted for fraud or a simple error?

There are separate guidelines for Errata, Retractions, and Expressions of Concern. Both journals and open access publishing entities will have specific guidelines for making these corrections. For example, *Nature* bases its decision-making on four guidelines:

- Consideration of reader interest
- Novelty of arguments
- Integrity of the publication record
- Fairness to the parties involved

The process of responding to an error in a published paper is complicated and burdensome to all involved. However, journal editors are responsible for maintaining the integrity of their publication and upholding strict standards for good science.

## What Should Authors Do on Realizing Mistakes in Their Published Research Paper?

Authors have two choices when faced with the revelation of an error in their published papers: attempt to avoid the consequences or make public corrections. Retraction policies and methods of correcting errors or creating an addendum to a [research paper](#) will vary by journals. When the author's and journal's reputation are at stake, it is best to deal with the error directly and quickly.

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