Description

Introduction

Start with a clear statistic or trend to hook the reader: pre-submission similarity checks flag a nontrivial fraction of manuscripts for problematic overlap, and some publishers report that roughly one in six submissions show levels of unoriginal text that require editorial attention. This matters because *text recycling* (often called *self-plagiarism*) and *duplicate publication* distort the scholarly record, create legal or copyright risks, and can delay or derail a career-critical submission.

This article defines the key terms, explains when reuse is permissible, describes how journals and editors treat different forms of reuse, and offers a practical pre-submission checklist and tips for researchers at every career stage.

What Is Self-Plagiarism (Text Recycling) and How Does It Differ From Plagiarism?

Self-plagiarism, or *text recycling*, occurs when authors reuse material from their own previously published or submitted work without transparent citation or disclosure. Unlike plagiarism of others' words or ideas, text recycling does not appropriate another person's intellectual property. However, it can still mislead readers by presenting old material as new and may breach publisher copyright agreements.

Many editors prefer the term *text recycling* because it reflects a spectrum of practices ranging from acceptable (limited reuse of methods text) to unacceptable (republishing the same results as novel work).

Typology: Forms of Reuse Editors Care About

- **Duplicate (redundant) publication:** Publishing the same study or substantially similar data in more than one venue without full disclosure. This is treated as serious misconduct because it inflates publication counts and can mislead meta-analyses.

- **Text recycling in methods, introductions, or background:** Often tolerated in small amounts if appropriately cited and if it does not claim novelty. Editors typically assess acceptability based on quantity, location (methods vs conclusions), and transparency.
- **Salami slicing (augmented publication):** Fragmenting one dataset into multiple minimally different papers or repackaging previously reported results with minor additions. This may be unethical if each paper does not offer an independent, substantive contribution.

When Is Reuse Allowed? Common, Legitimate Exceptions

- **Standardised methods sections:** Limited verbatim reuse may be acceptable when procedures are well established, provided the original source is cited and the editor is informed.
- **Theses and dissertations:** Converting a thesis into journal articles is widely accepted, but prior work should be cited and publisher copyright issues addressed.
- **Preprints and protocol reuse:** Most journals do not treat preprints as prior publication, but authors must disclose them. Reusing protocol text is often acceptable with citation.
- **Secondary publication with permission:** Translations or dissemination to different audiences may be permitted when transparently handled and approved by the original publisher.

When Reuse Is Not Allowed: Editorial Red Flags

- Reproducing the same data, results, discussion, or conclusions across multiple papers without cross-reference or justification.
- Verbatim copying of large sections from previously published material without citation or permission, even if the author wrote the original text.
- Failure to disclose prior dissemination (preprints, conference proceedings, theses) when required by the target journal or when overlap undermines novelty.

How Journals Detect and Respond to Reuse

Most journals screen submissions using similarity-detection tools such as iThenticate or Crossref Similarity Check. Editors then apply contextual judgment, often guided by COPE flowcharts and journal-specific policies.

Outcomes range from requests for revision or clearer citation to desk rejection, published corrections, or rarely retraction when duplication compromises the integrity of the scholarly record.

Practical Guidance for Authors: Best Practices Before Submission

Pre-Submission Checklist

1. Run a similarity check using tools comparable to those used by journals and manually review all flagged matches.
2. Cite earlier work clearly whenever text, data, or ideas are reused, including theses, conference papers, and preprints.

3. Declare all prior dissemination in the cover letter and manuscript, following the journal's instructions for authors.
4. When dividing projects into multiple papers, ensure each manuscript has a distinct research question and contribution, and explain differences clearly.
5. Paraphrase carefully by changing both wording and structure, and maintain accurate source notes to avoid patchwriting.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

- Treating similarity scores as definitive judgments rather than prompts for contextual review.
- Overlooking copyright transfer agreements that may restrict reuse of previously published text.
- Failing to disclose incremental or related publications that draw from the same dataset.

Real-World Context and Research Evidence

Studies of retractions and similarity analyses show that self-plagiarism and redundant publication persist across disciplines. Large initiatives such as the Text Recycling Research Project highlight significant variation between fields and emphasize the need for contextual, policy-driven editorial decisions.

Supporting Early-Career Researchers

Institutions and supervisors should provide clear guidance on acceptable reuse and offer training in paraphrasing and citation. Early discussion of publication plans can prevent salami slicing and duplicate submissions. Editors, in turn, should publish transparent policies and allow authors to explain overlaps during review.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Text recycling exists on a continuum from efficient reuse of standard methods language to unethical duplicate publication. Editorial decisions hinge on transparency, extent and location of overlap, novelty of contribution, and copyright status.

Authors can reduce risk by adopting a consistent pre-submission workflow: running similarity checks, citing and explaining reuse, obtaining permissions when needed, and revising flagged sections. Targeted editorial support or plagiarism-check services may help authors interpret similarity reports and ensure compliance before submission.

Sources and Further Reading

A curated list of COPE guidance, publisher ethics policies, editorial analyses, and institutional resources is available to support deeper exploration of text recycling and self-plagiarism standards.

Category

1. Publishing Research

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