

What You Need to Know About the New Core Practices of COPE

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COPE's guidelines have always been voluntary best practices instead of enforceable standards. This fact is emphasized again with the [release of the new Core Practices](#). Although the Core Practices are intended as recommendations only, there are some consequences for those organizations that are members of COPE and fail to follow the guidelines. It should also be remembered that the Core Practices do not replace the research standards of different academic fields and national or international affiliations.

What are the New Guidelines from COPE?

Journal editors and publishers should pay close attention to new Core Practices recommended by the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#). The Core Practices were released in November, 2017. They greatly simplify COPE's previous Codes of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines. The new Core Practices have organized the guidelines into 10 problem areas in publishing and these apply to both editors and publishers.

How do the Core Practices relate to Risk Management?

If editors and publishers are not following basic policies and procedures for ethical publishing, they leave themselves open to criticism and even litigation. These consequences reflect negatively on the journal, the host institution, and the contributing authors. COPE identifies and describes ethical problems in publishing and ways to avoid these problems.

There is great benefit in adhering to best practices for ethical publishing. [COPE's 10 Core Practice Areas](#) are as follows:

- Allegations of misconduct
- Authorship and contributorship
- Handling of complaints or appeals
- Conflicts of interest
- Data and reproducibility
- Ethical oversight
- Intellectual property issues
- Journal management
- Peer review process and training
- Post-publication discussion and corrections

Take a moment to review the [list of Core Practices](#) online. Have you encountered or thought about any of these potentially serious problems? Is there a clear plan for dealing with each of these areas of conflict? For each of the 10 problem areas, COPE provides several expert articles, such as "How to spot authorship problems" and "Text recycling guidelines". COPE recommends that journals and publishers adopt and publish clear policies and procedures that respond to potential problems identified in the Core Practices.

The ten problem areas in the Core Practices should not be confused with the 16 principles of transparency, also found on the COPE website. There is some overlap between these principles of transparency and the new Core Practices. To avoid confusion, editors and publishers should focus on the Core Practices first.

How Can My Organization Benefit from COPE's New Rules on Membership?

It is worth mentioning once again that membership in COPE is voluntary and the [organization is not a regulatory body](#) but rather an advisory service. Many journal editors and publishers are members of COPE. Among the COPE member organizations are three of the biggest publishing groups in academia: Wiley, Elsevier, and Springer. Previously, only editors and publishers could become members. According to the new rules of COPE, institutions may also join COPE.

One benefit of becoming a member of COPE is the formal commitment to the Core Practices. When your organization commits to guidelines established by an independent group like COPE, this gives more clarity and credibility to your organization's own internal policies.

Other benefits of COPE membership include confidential review of ethical questions and scenarios and several opportunities for online or in-person training. There are a number of useful resources for risk management and these are free to any user, whether a COPE member or not.

Despite the rules of membership, there were rules regarding being expelled from COPE. Under COPE's rules, a member can be expelled from COPE if it is not following the Core Practices. This rule is nothing new, only recently clarified to make it clear what actions would trigger expulsion from COPE. The new rule states that a member would be expelled from COPE if it:

1. Violates or resists any changes needed to be done to prevent the violation of COPE publication ethics.
2. Acts in unethical ways repeatedly.
3. Fails to engage with COPE to remediate ethical issues.

The case of expelling would be a rare occurrence. COPE has issued this policy to adhere to its own principles of transparency and good ethical practice. As one observer from the publishing industry has noted,

"The statement also makes it clear that expulsion would be a last resort. It appears that COPE very much intends to stick to its mission of change through education."

Focus on the Core Practices

Whether or not membership in COPE is the right choice for your organization, understanding the Core Practices and incorporating these in your own policies is a good idea. Any journal or publisher can formulate policies to ensure the integrity of the publication, prevent or minimize conflicts, and handle the situations described in the ten problem areas. Universities and research institutions should also encourage researchers to learn about the potential ethical problems of authorship and how they can do their part to ensure high quality publication in their field.

What are your views on the new Core Practices of COPE? Will they be beneficial to the researchers? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

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