

PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR THE AAS JOURNALS

1. ETHICS

As implicit conditions for publishing in *The Astrophysical Journal* and *The Astronomical Journal*, authors are expected to adhere to basic standards of professional ethics and conduct that are common across all areas of scholarly publishing. In the publication agreement authors warrant that their work is original and has not been published elsewhere. All parties are also expected to conform to common standards of professional respect and civility. Fortunately, in astronomy publishing these standards are upheld in the overwhelming majority of instances. However, misunderstandings and lapses in professional conduct do occur, including instances (or accusations) of plagiarism, inadequate attribution, conflicts of interest, or personally abusive behavior toward referees, authors, editors, or journal staff members. This document summarizes the expected standards of professional and ethical conduct, with specific application to publication in the AAS journals.

2. PLAGIARISM AND REPUBLICATION

Plagiarism is the act of reproducing text or other materials from other papers without properly crediting the source. Such material is regarded as being plagiarized regardless of whether it is cited literally or has been modified or paraphrased. Plagiarism represents a serious ethical breach, and may constitute legal breach of copyright if the reproduced material has been previously published. Authors who wish to quote directly from other published work must fully cite the original reference, and include any cited text in quotation marks. *AJ* and *ApJ* authors are discouraged from including such direct quotations in papers, apart from rare instances when such a quotation is appropriate for historical reasons. Figures may only be reproduced with permission and must be fully cited in the figure caption, following guidelines that are posted on the *ApJ* and *AJ* Web sites.

3. ATTRIBUTION AND CITATION PRACTICE

Papers published in the *AJ* and *ApJ* should include citations to previously published papers which are directly relevant to the results being presented. This requirement is especially important when new ideas or results are being presented. Deliberate refusal to credit or cite prior or corroborating results, while not regarded technically as constituting plagiarism, represents a comparable breach of professional ethics, and can result in summary rejection of a manuscript. However, an unintentional failure to cite a relevant paper, while regrettable, does not necessarily imply misconduct. The rapid growth in the astronomical literature in recent years makes it difficult for an author to be aware of every relevant paper, and the inclusion of exhaustive compendia of references is not possible; the *ApJ* and *AJ* do not publish review articles. However, authors are expected to devote the same care to the correctness and appropriateness of literature citations as to the other components of the manuscript, and to heed the recommendations of referees and editors to correct and augment the citations when appropriate. Responsibility for updating references after acceptance (but before publication) of a paper rests fully with the authors, but the same principles should apply.

Strictly speaking, authors are not formally required to cite unpublished or unrefereed materials, especially in cases where the veracity of the unpublished work may be in question. However,

when principles of common professional courtesy dictate that such attribution is appropriate, authors are expected to honor these conventions.

4. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The *AJ* and *ApJ* peer review systems are based on a single-reviewer model, in which a single referee assumes responsibility for evaluating the scientific veracity, clarity, and significance of the results presented. For such a system to function effectively it is essential that the referee be free of any conflicts of interest that might influence the content or the promptness of the review. When a paper is submitted, authors may identify individuals who they believe are conflicted and should not serve as referees. Likewise, individuals who are asked to review a paper should identify any potential conflicts of interest, so the editor can determine whether these are substantive enough to disqualify that reviewer. In most instances an individual working at the same institution as one of the co-authors is ineligible to referee the paper. Editors must also guard against conflicts of interest, and by journal policy they are required to disqualify themselves whenever a real or perceived conflict is present.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

Except in cases where referees waive their anonymity with the concurrence of the editor, all *AJ* and *ApJ* peer reviews are conducted under conditions of strict confidentiality. The journals and their editors will not reveal the identity of referees or the contents of peer review correspondence to individuals outside of the respective peer review process for a minimum period of 75 years. Referees are also bound by strict confidentiality; neither the manuscripts nor the contents of referee correspondence may be shared with other parties without written permission from the editor.

Strictly speaking, authors are not bound by similar confidentiality requirements (for example they may choose to consult with co-authors and colleagues when revising a paper in response to a referee report), but public dissemination of the contents of referee reports and editorial correspondence is inappropriate. Any author who does so forfeits their rights to confidentiality protection by the journals.

6. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND CIVILITY

All participants in the publication process, including editors, authors, referees, and journal staff members, are expected to conform to basic standards of professional courtesy, and respect the basic rules and guidelines that govern the peer review and publication process. Criticism and debate, even energetic debate, are normal parts of the intellectual process, but only when conducted with civility and professional respect for all parties. Personal attacks or verbal abuse, whether oral or written, are unacceptable under any circumstances, and the journals reserve the right to refuse submissions from individuals who repeatedly violate these guidelines or refuse to cooperate with editors and referees in the normal peer review and publication processes.

7. INVESTIGATION OF MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

The integrity of our journals rests on the professionalism of its authors, referees, and editors. Alleged cases of unethical conduct will be investigated vigorously by the Editors in Chief of the

journals and if necessary will be referred to the AAS Publications Board or Council for further inquiry or action. Accusations of misconduct falling outside of the peer review or publication process may be more properly directed to the relevant institutional authorities. Editorial inquiries will be conducted with the maximum degree of confidentiality that is practical. The *ApJ* and *AJ* also recognize their obligation to protect their authors and referees against frivolous or unfounded allegations of misconduct. The leveling of unfounded allegations against others is no more acceptable than the alleged acts themselves, and repeated

frivolous complaints by individuals may be summarily dismissed by the journal editors.

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