

IJMS Guidelines for Authors' Complaints

The complainant must be made aware that the matter cannot be investigated unless the journal editor informs the corresponding author or author about whom a complaint has been made (as a matter of “due process”) and possibly the institution or company at which the research took place (the complainant may not wish to make the complaint at such a formal level).

In that communication, the editor should indicate that the matter may be referred to the institution or company where the research took place or any other relevant institution or agency (i.e., a funding agency) unless the author provides a reasonable explanation (accepted as reasonable by the editor).

It may be advisable for the editor in this fact-finding process to request the views and comments of third parties who may be expected to have knowledge of the facts alleged by the complainant.

What if the corresponding (or complained-about) author accepts the position of the complainant? Then publication of a correction, corrigendum or retraction procedures are the normal remedies. Note that there may still be disagreement concerning the appropriate classification of the complainant's contribution to the paper or how the complainant is identified.

What if the corresponding (or complained-about) author rejects the position of the complainant? Then the editor will have to consider whether the author's explanation is reasonable. Normally, the editor would also inform the complainant of the author's explanation and seek comment.

What if the corresponding/complained-about author has not responded to the editor's correspondence? Then the editor may want to refer the matter to the institution or company at which the research took place.

What if the institution or company responds and indicate they will investigate and mediate the result? Then the editor should inform the corresponding author and complainant that the journal will seriously consider the decision of the institutional review. Note, however, that the editor may still determine that the result of the institutional review is insufficient or inaccurate.

What if the institution responds negatively or does not respond? This should be reviewed with the complainant (perhaps the complainant is better placed to make the complaint directly with the institution).

What if a funding agency is involved? To determine this, you should review the disclosure statements or acknowledgments in the article. If so, then the editor may wish to consider contacting the agency.

What if the authors, employing institutions and funding agencies fail to reach consensus or fail to act in a reasonable time or manner? Then the editor will be expected to make a determination, in his or her reasonable judgment, as to the underlying facts and to make a recommendation to the Editorial Board, normally through a corrigendum or retraction.

COPE flowcharts

- [Corresponding author requests addition of extra author before publication](#)
- [Corresponding author requests removal of author before publication](#)
- [Request for addition of extra author after publication](#)
- [Request for removal of author after publication](#)
- [Suspected guest, ghost or gift authorship](#)
- [Advice on how to spot authorship problems](#)