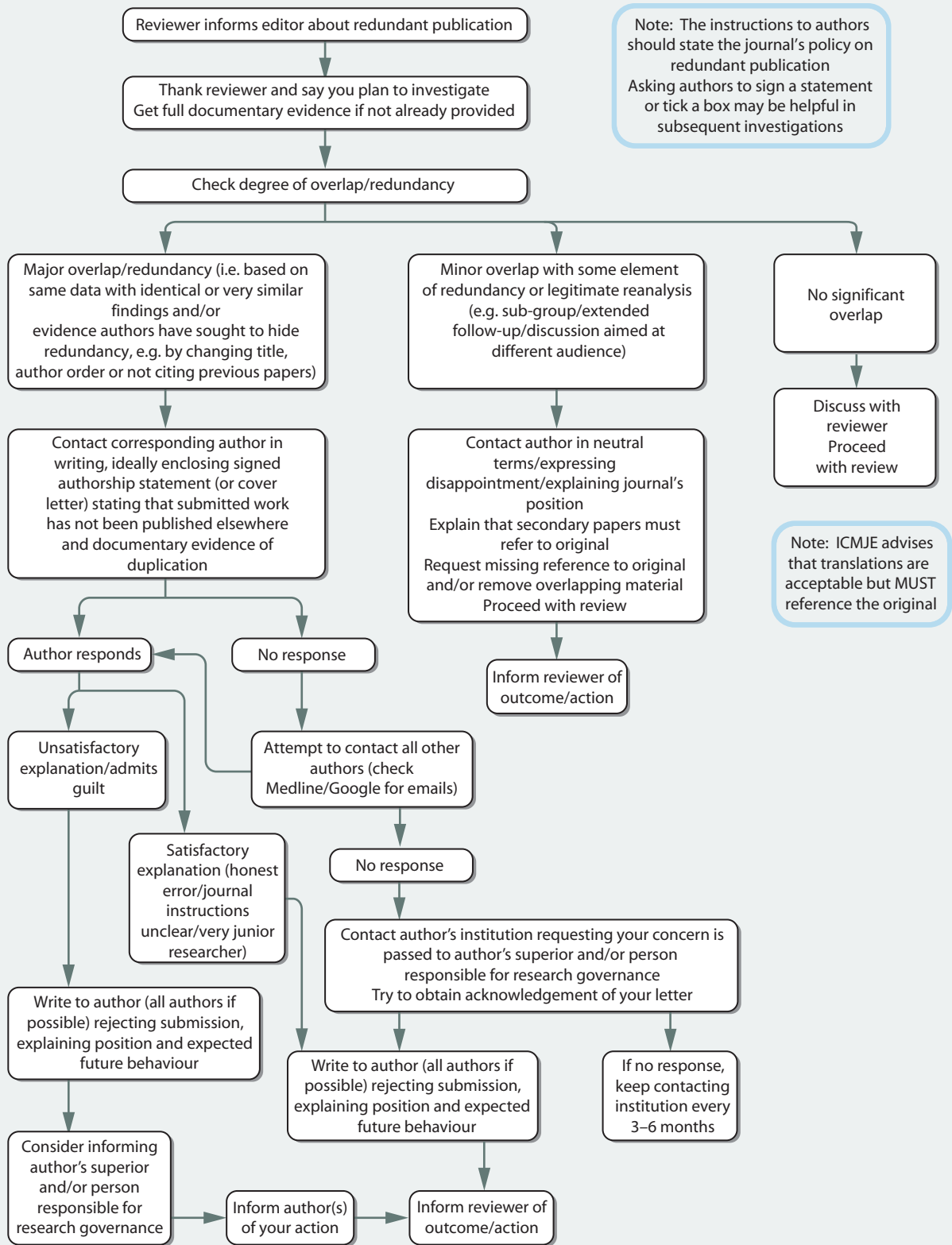


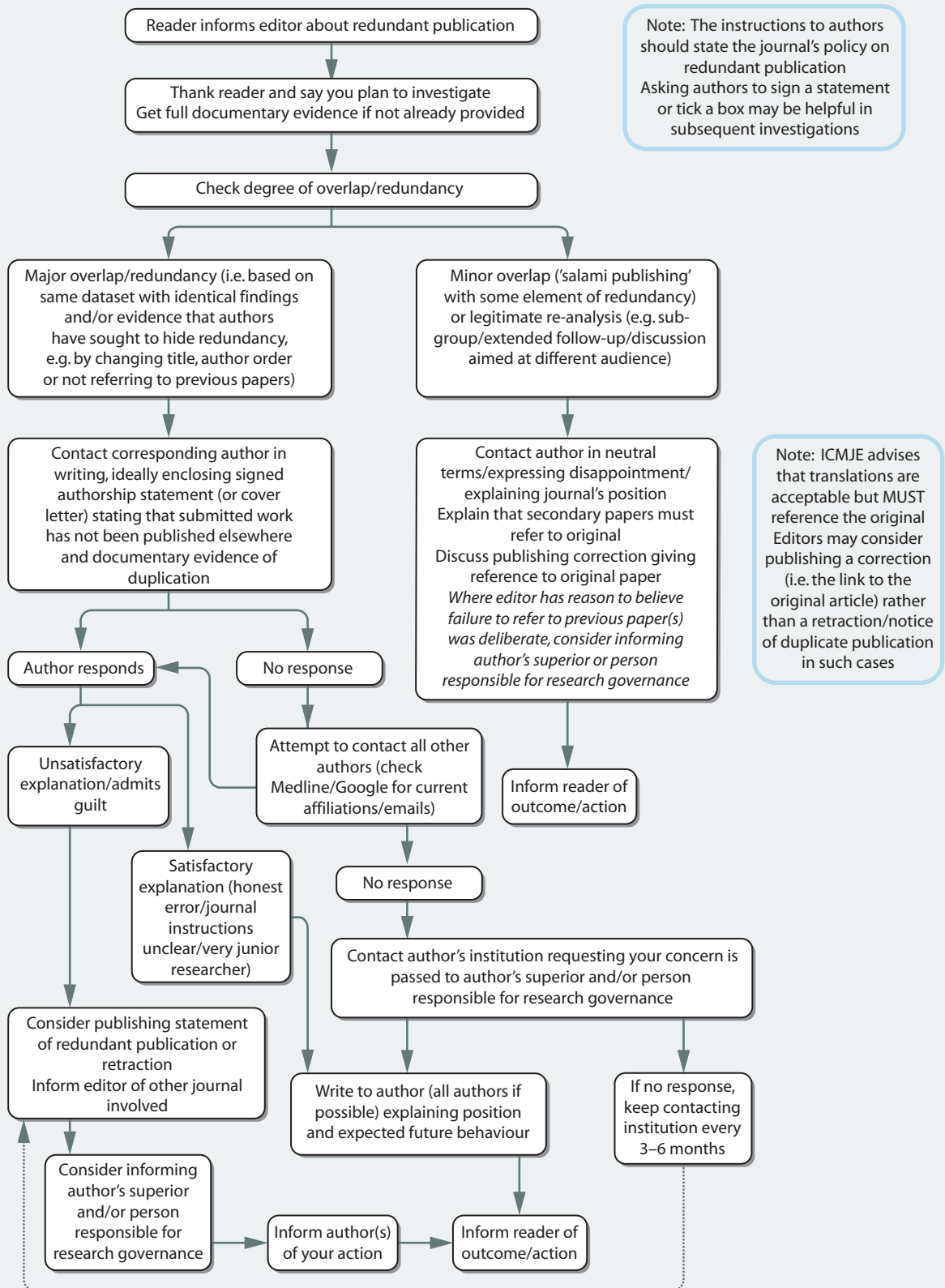
**What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication**

(a) Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript



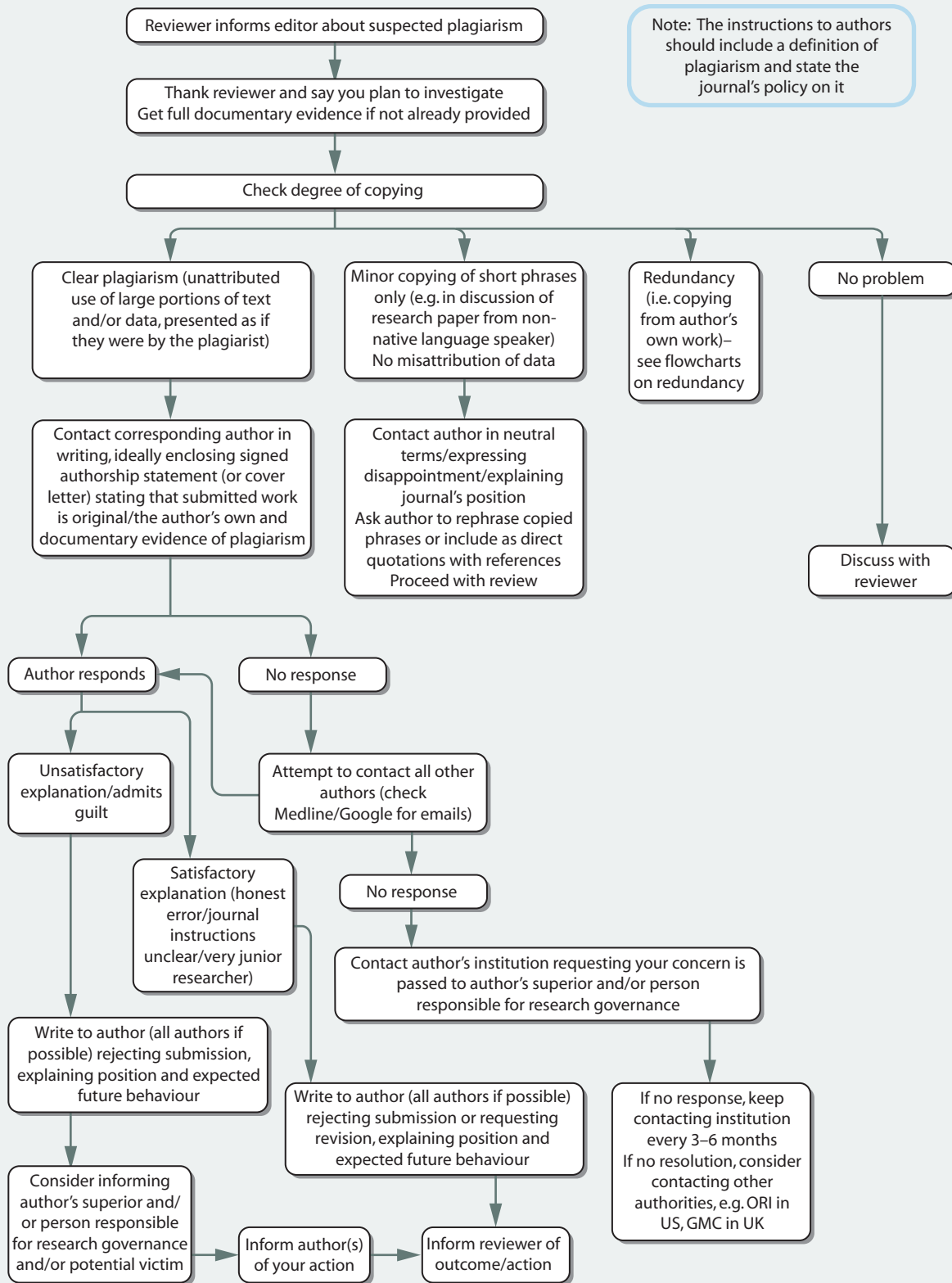
**What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication**

(b) Suspected redundant publication in a published article

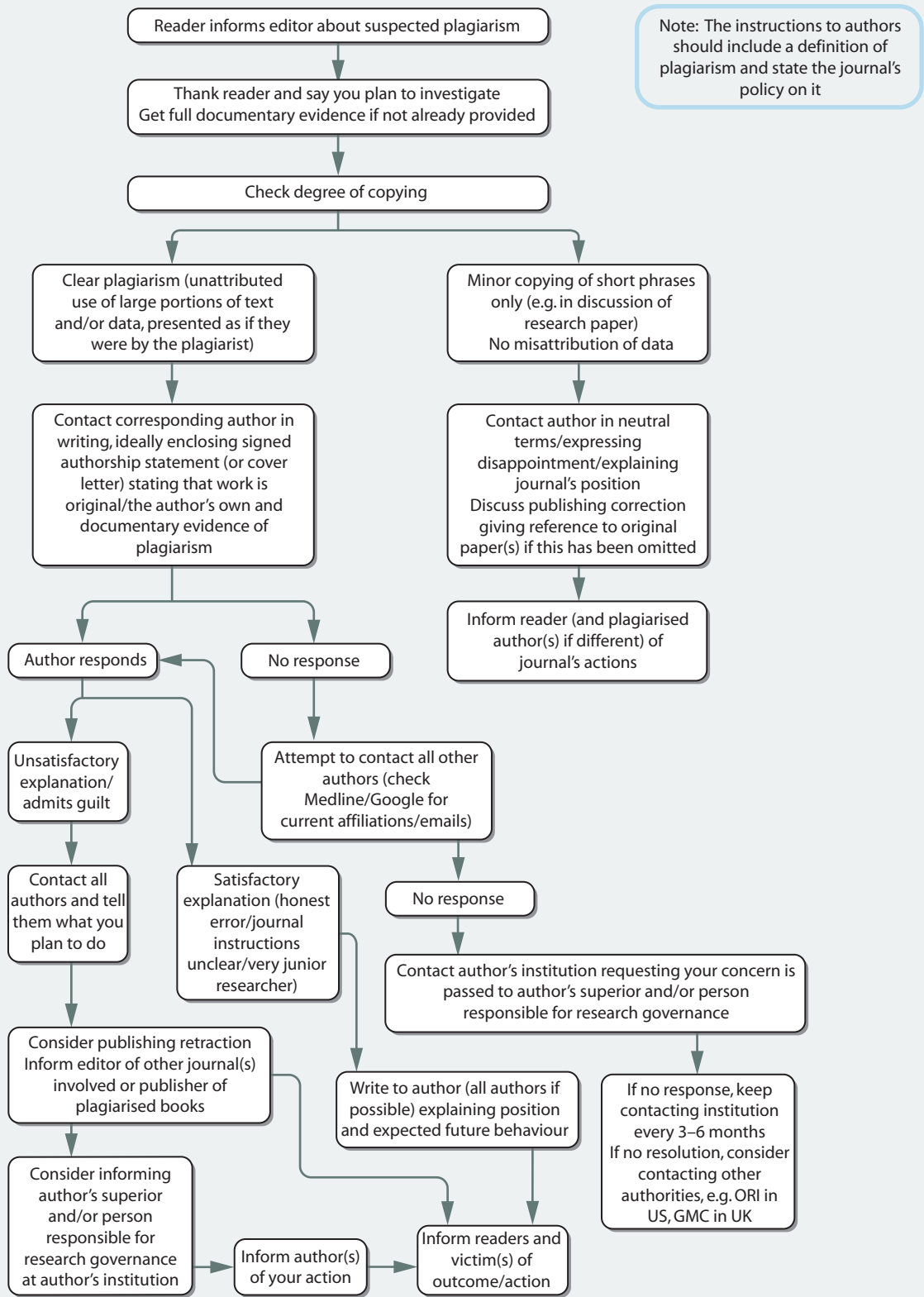


What to do if you suspect plagiarism

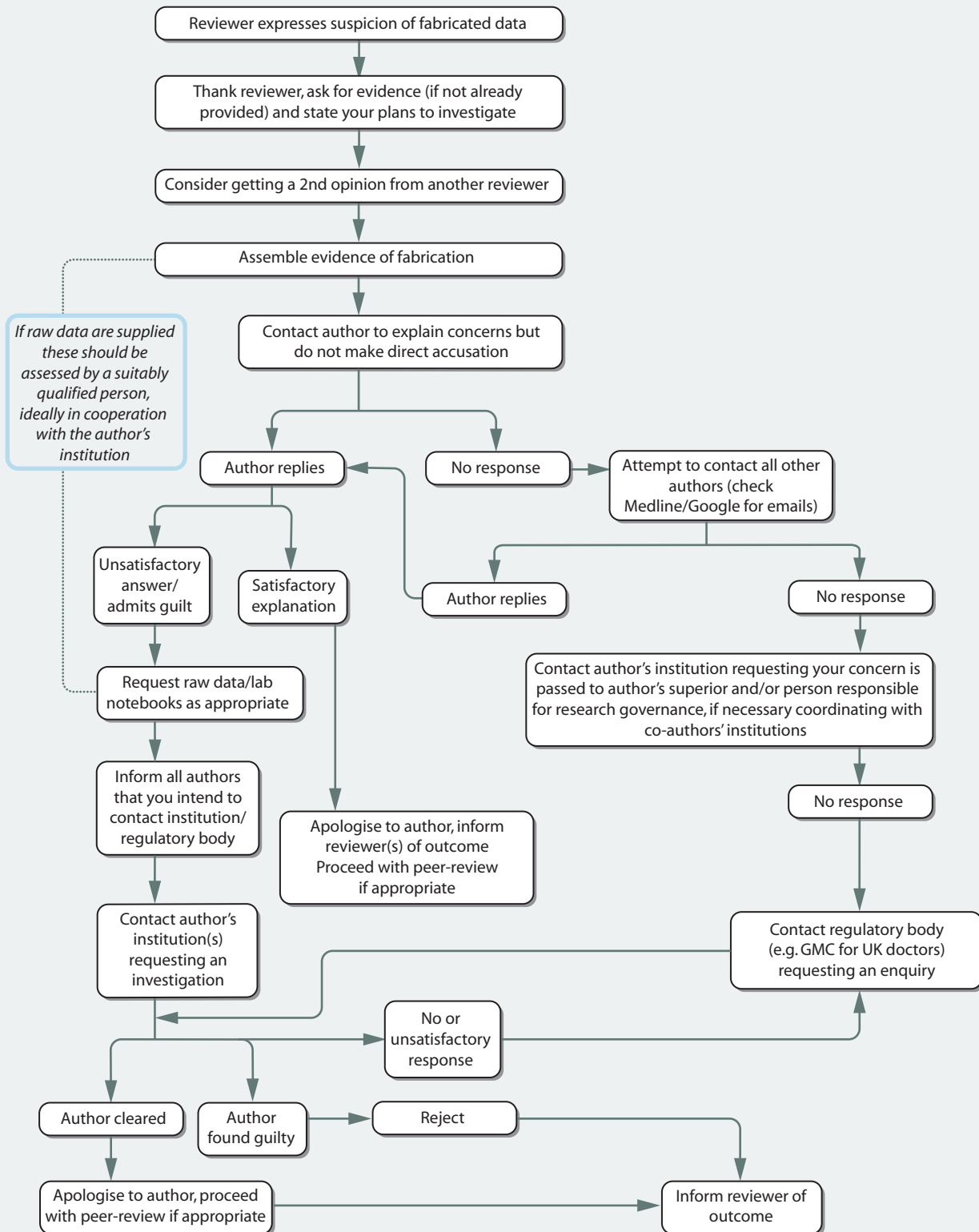
(a) Suspected plagiarism in a submitted manuscript



**What to do if you suspect plagiarism**  
(b) Suspected plagiarism in a published article

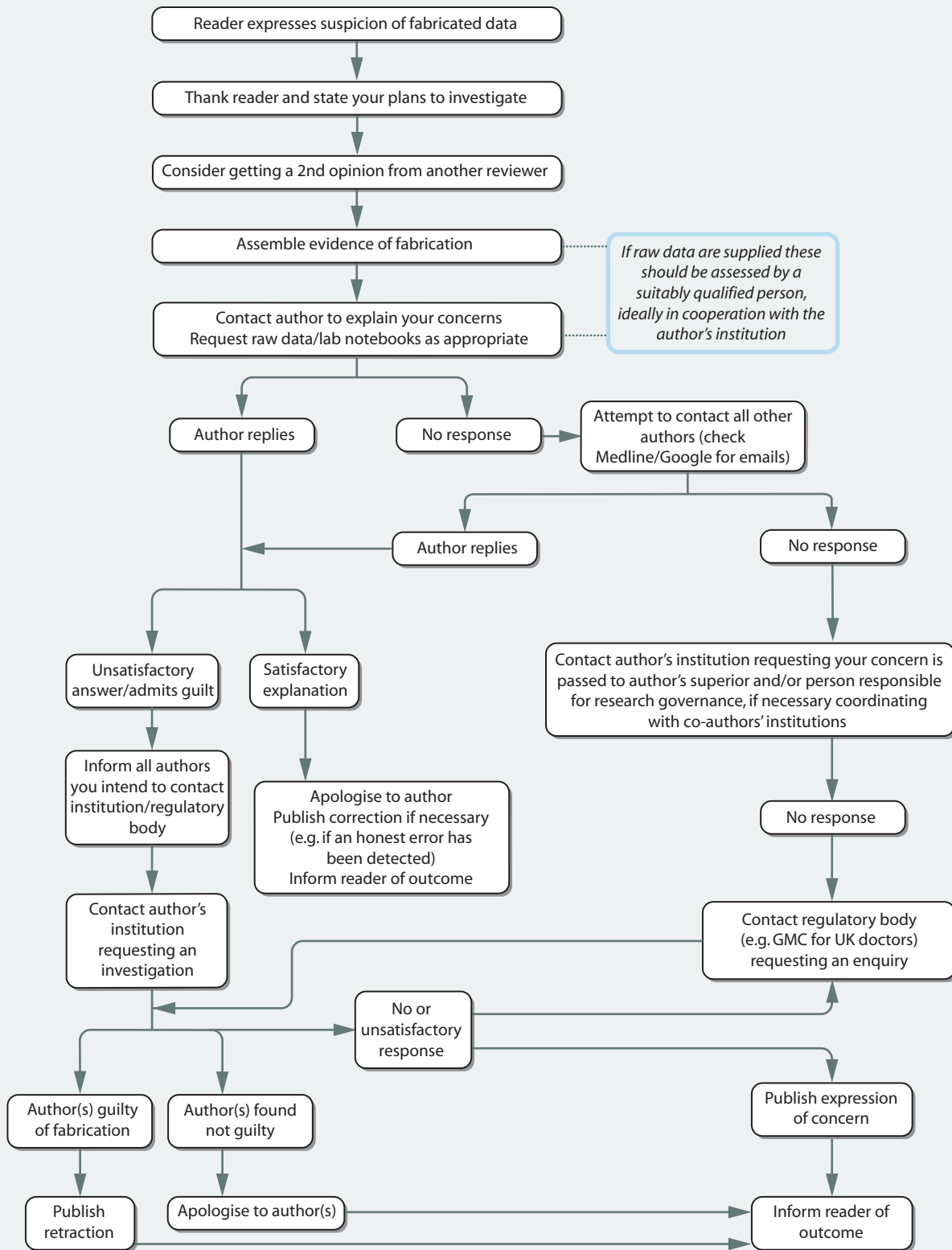


**What to do if you suspect fabricated data**  
 (a) Suspected fabricated data in a submitted manuscript



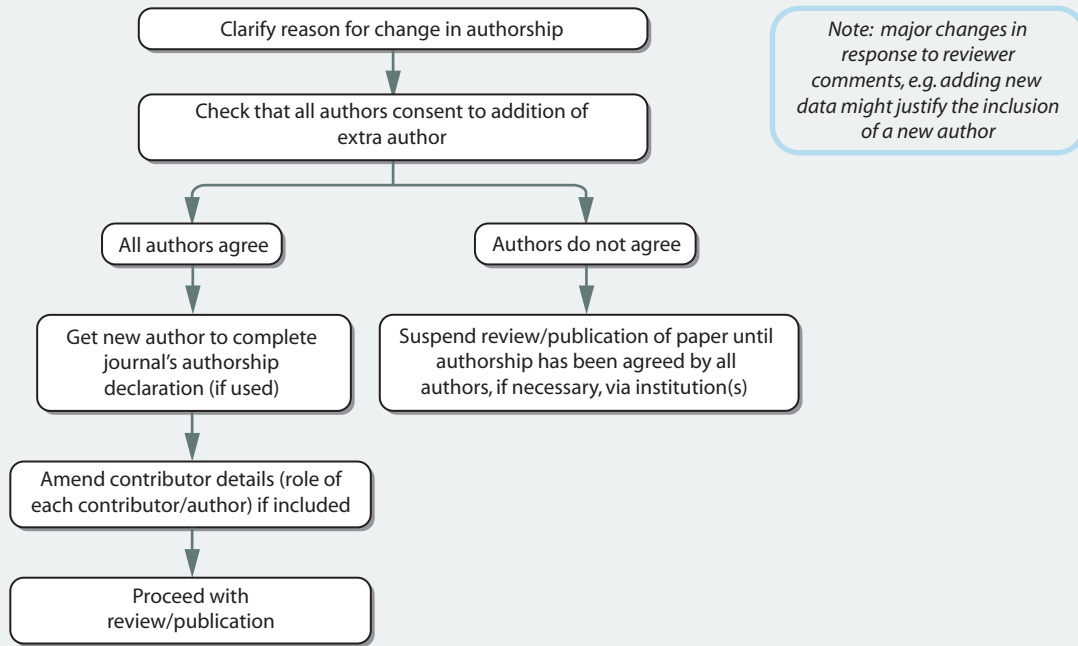
What to do if you suspect fabricated data

(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published article



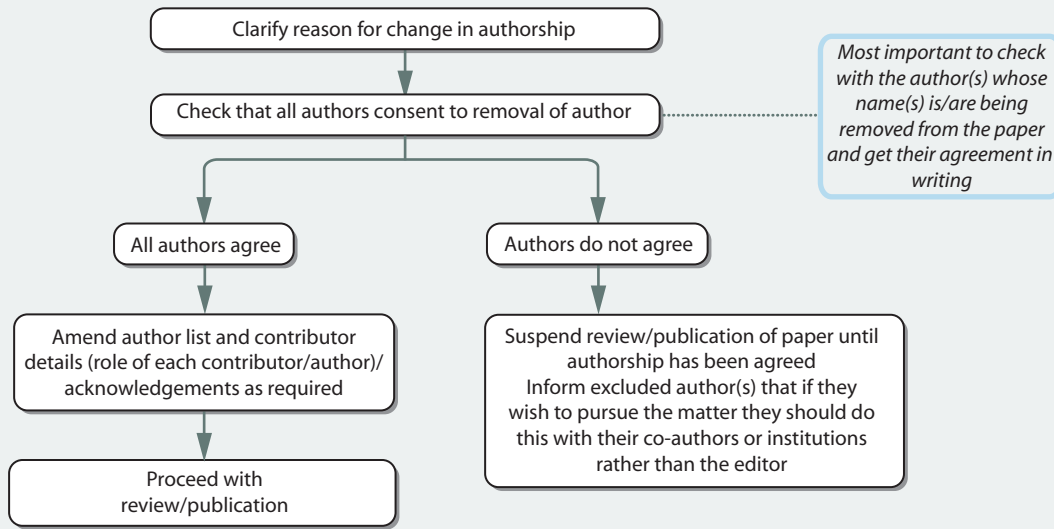
**Changes in authorship**

(a) Corresponding author requests addition of extra author before publication



Changes in authorship

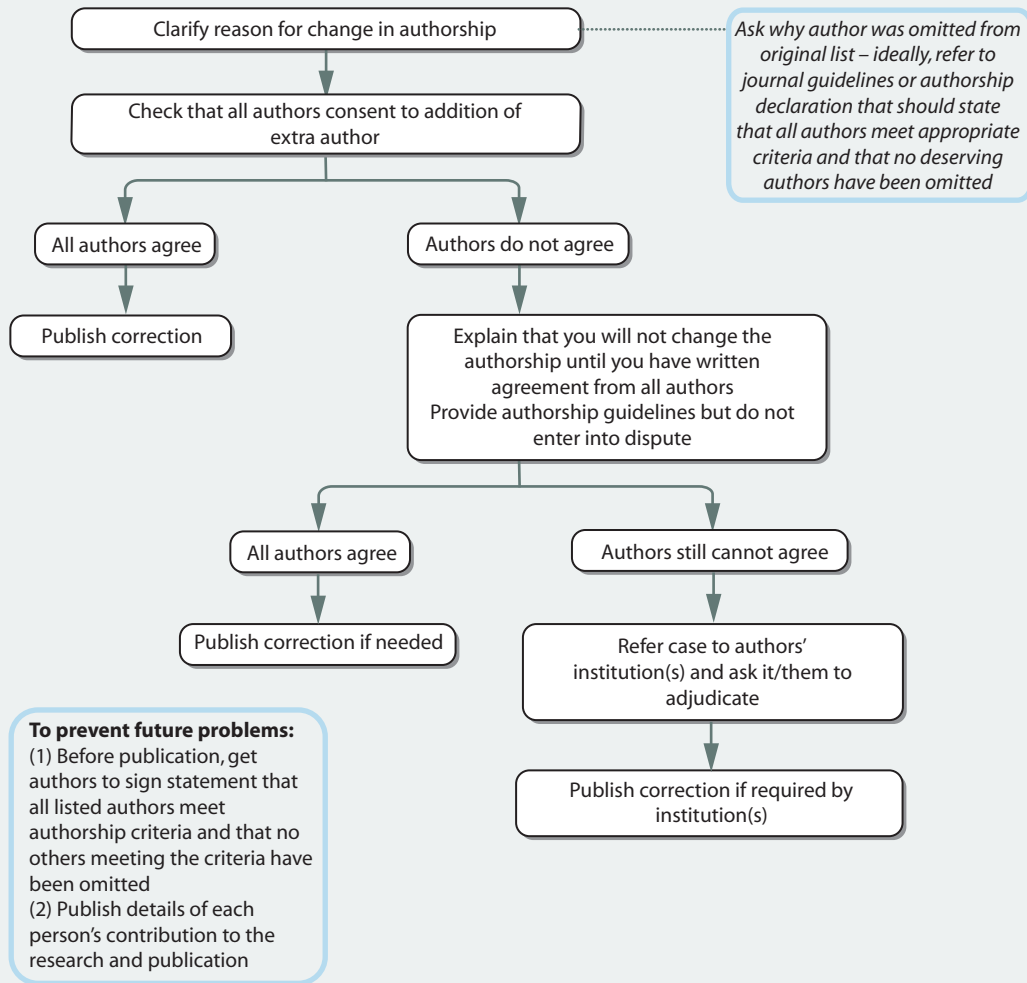
(b) Corresponding author requests removal of author before publication





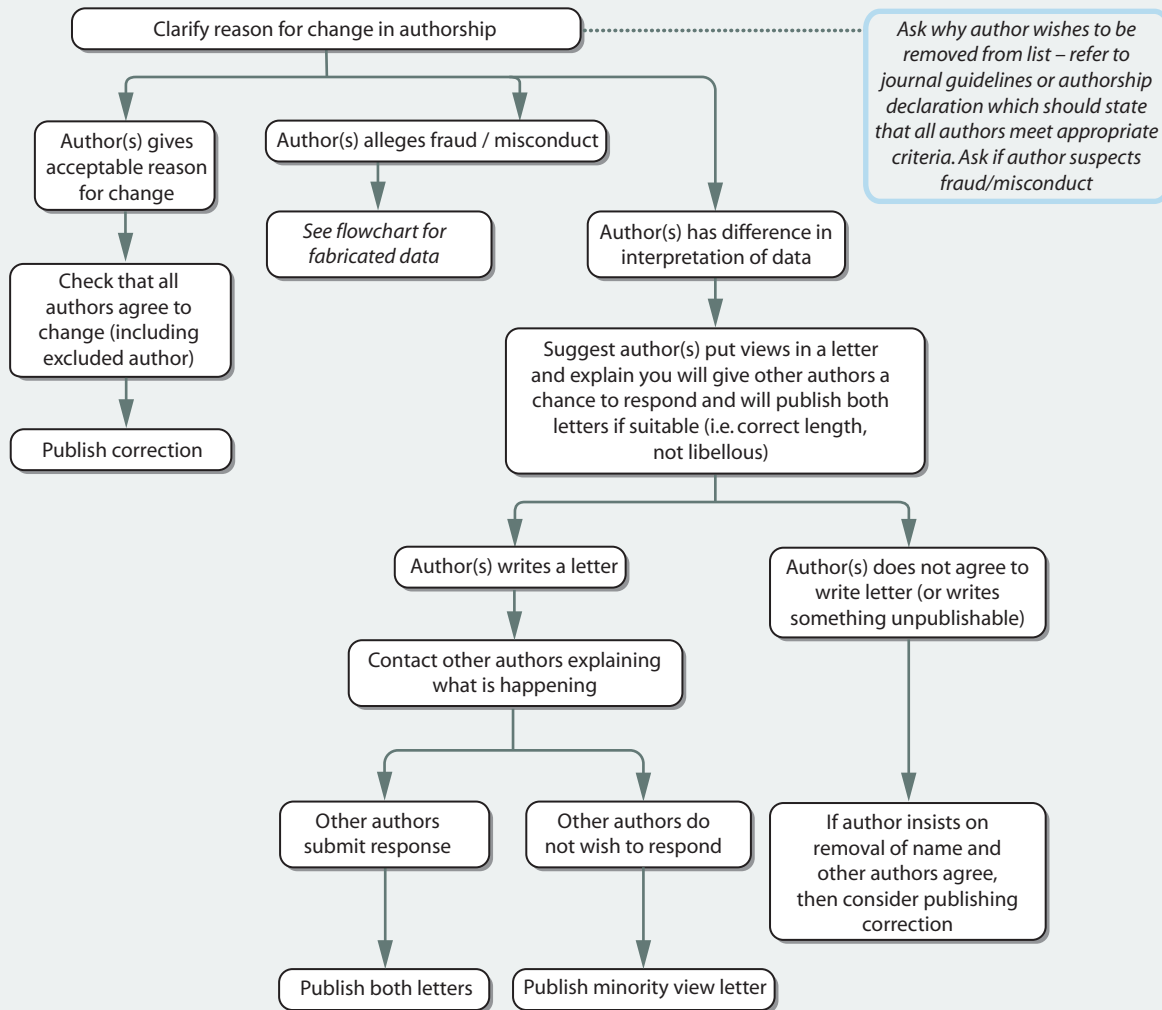
Changes in authorship

(c) Request for addition of extra author after publication



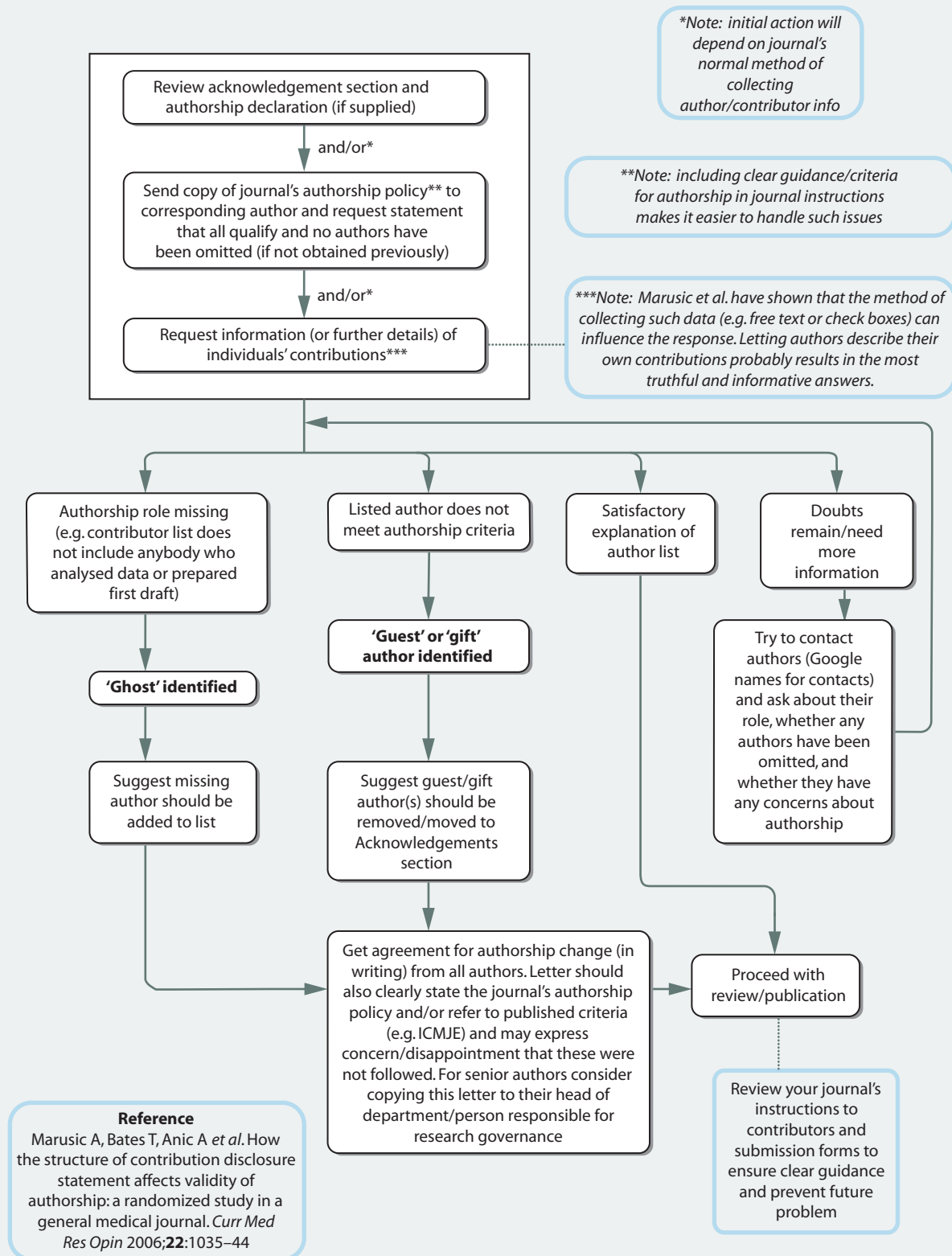
Changes in authorship

(d) Request for removal of author after publication



**What to do if you suspect ghost, guest or gift authorship**

(see also flowcharts on *Changes in authorship*, as such requests may indicate the presence of a ghost or gift author)



## How to spot authorship problems

Editors cannot police author or contributor listing for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors. The COPE flowchart on 'What to do if you suspect ghost, guest or gift authorship' suggests actions for these situations. The following points are designed to help editors be alert for inappropriate authorship and spot warning signs which may indicate problems.

### Types of authorship problems

A **ghost author** is someone who is omitted from an authorship list despite qualifying for authorship. This is not necessarily the same as a **ghost writer**, since omitted authors often perform other roles, in particular data analysis. (Gøtzsche *et al.* have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted from papers reporting industry-funded trials.) If a professional writer has been involved with a publication it will depend on the authorship criteria being used whether s/he fulfils the criteria to be listed as an author. Using the ICMJE criteria for research papers, medical writers usually do not qualify as authors, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A **guest or gift author** is someone who is listed as an author despite not qualifying for authorship. Guests are generally people brought in to make the list look more impressive (despite having little or no involvement with the research or publication). Gift authorship often involves mutual CV enhancement (i.e. including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs).

### Signs that might indicate authorship problems

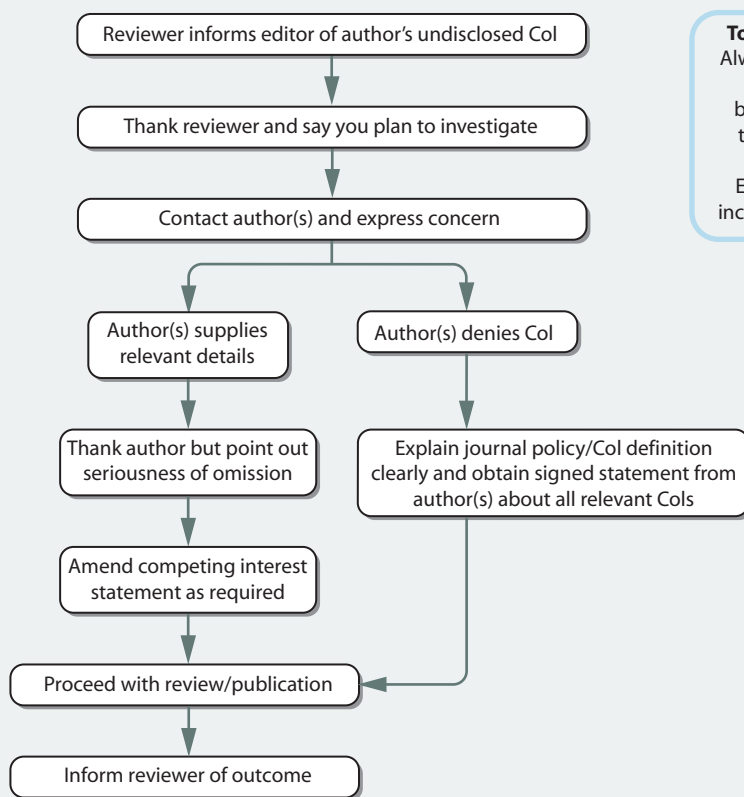
- Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments
- Changes are made by somebody not on the author list (*check Word document properties to see who made the changes but bear in mind there may be an innocent explanation for this, e.g. using a shared computer, or a secretary making changes*)
- Document properties show the manuscript was drafted by someone not on the author list or properly acknowledged (*but see above*)
- Impossibly prolific author e.g. of review articles / opinion pieces (check also for redundant / overlapping publication) (*this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the author's name*)
- Several similar review articles / editorials / opinion pieces have been published under different author names (*this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the article title or key words*)
- Role missing from list of contributors (e.g. it appears that none of the named authors were responsible for analysing the data or drafting the paper)
- Unfeasibly long or short author list (e.g. a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomized trial with a single author)
- Industry-funded study with no authors from sponsor company (*this may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the protocol may help determine the role of employees -- see Gøtzsche et al. and commentary by Wager*)

### References

Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, Haahr MT, Altman DG *et al.* Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. *PLoS Med* 2007;**4(1)**:e19. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019

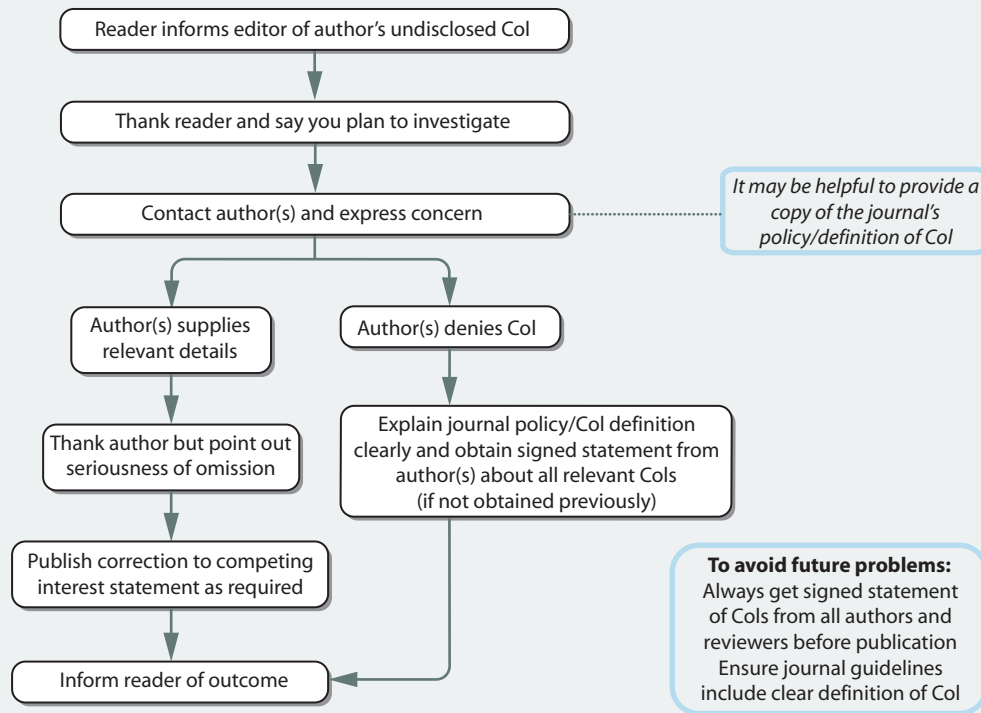
Wager E (2007) Authors, Ghosts, Damned Lies, and Statisticians. *PLoS Med* 2007;**4(1)**:e34. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034

What to do if a reviewer suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a submitted manuscript

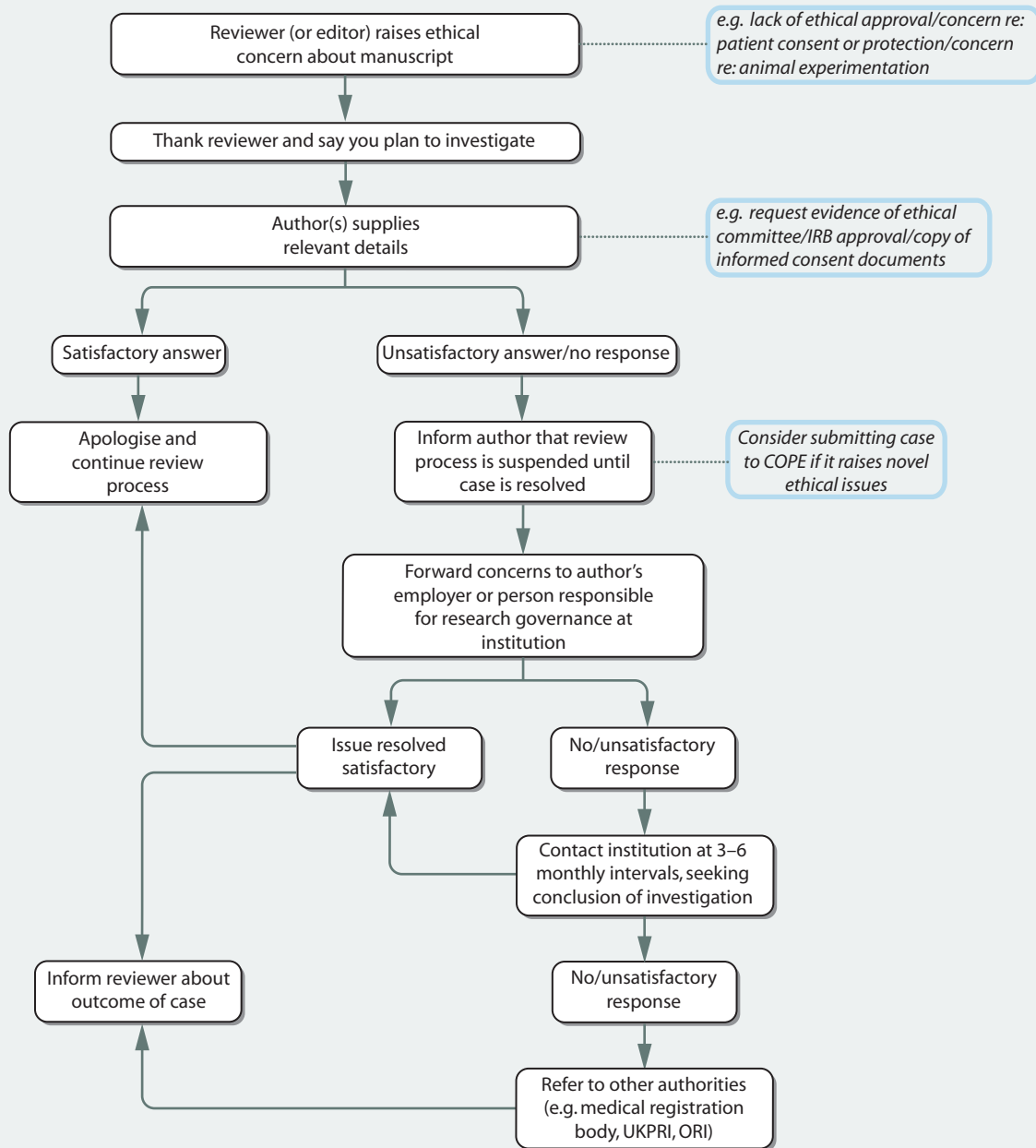


**To avoid future problems:**  
 Always get signed statement of Col's from all authors before publication (or get them to tick a box if they declare no conflict)  
 Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of Col

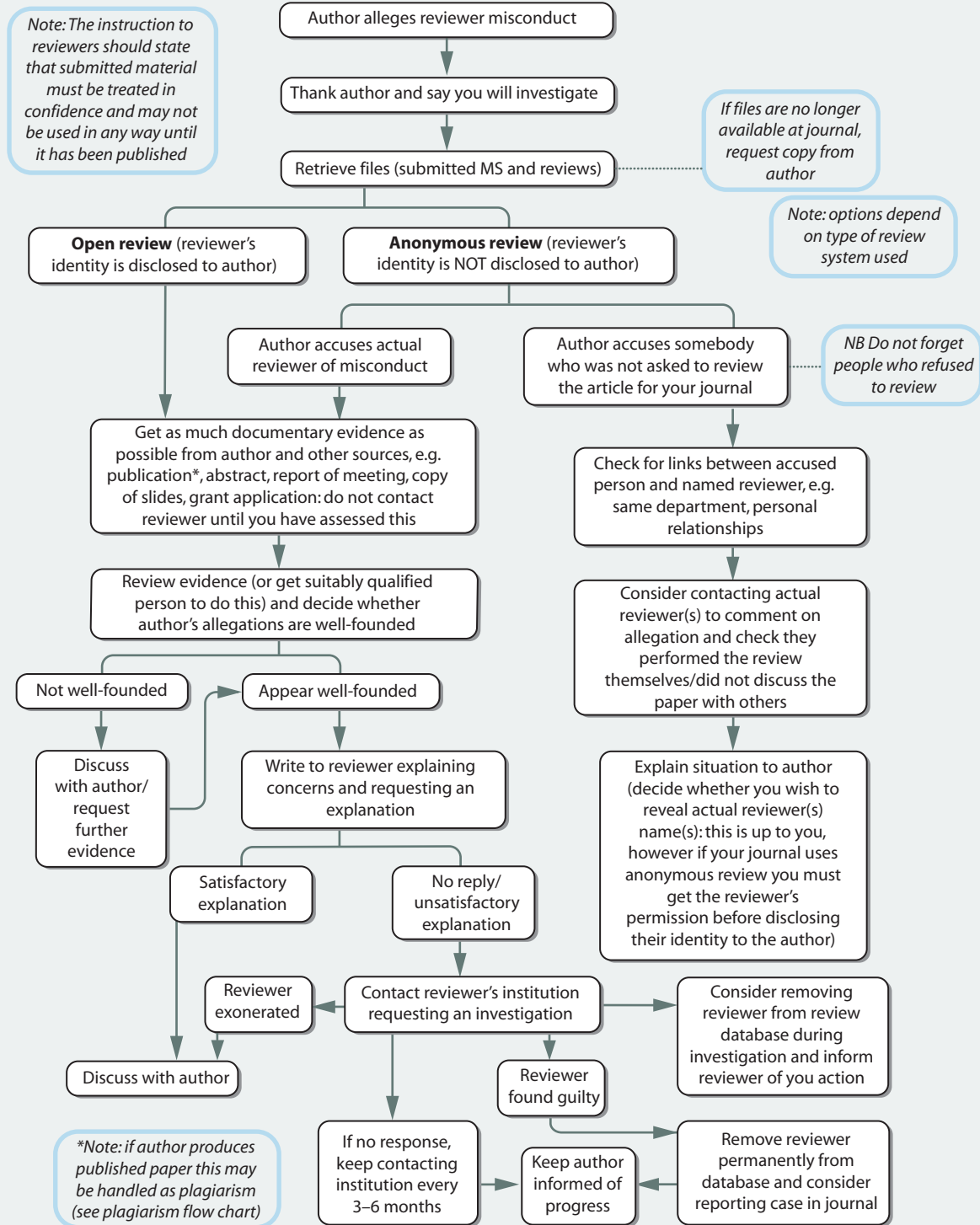
What to do if a reader suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a published article



What to do if you suspect an ethical problem with a submitted manuscript



What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author's ideas or data





How COPE handles complaints against editors

