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

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If files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

Keep author informed of progress

If files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

Consider contacting actual reviewer(s) to comment on allegation and check they performed the review themselves/did not discuss the paper with others

Explain situation to author (decide whether you wish to reveal actual reviewer(s) name(s); this is up to you, however if your journal uses anonymous review you must get the reviewer's permission before disclosing their identity to the author)

Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation

Satisfactory explanation

Consider removing reviewer from review database during investigation and inform reviewer of your action

Remove reviewer permanently from database and consider reporting case in journal

Discuss with author

No reply/unsatisfactory explanation

Peer review exonerated

Discuss with author

Author accuses actual reviewer of misconduct

Review evidence (or get suitably qualified person to do this) and decide whether author’s allegations are well-founded

Not well-founded

Appears well-founded

Author accuses somebody who was not asked to review the article for your journal

Get as much documentary evidence as possible from author and other sources, e.g. publication*, abstract, report of meeting, copy of slides, grant application: do not contact reviewer until you have assessed this

Check for links between accused person and named reviewer, e.g. same department, personal relationships

Review evidence (or get suitably qualified person to do this) and decide whether author's allegations are well-founded

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

If no further evidence

Keep author informed of progress

Author accuses somebody who was not asked to review the article for your journal

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Note
The instruction to reviewers should state that submitted material must be treated in confidence and may not be used in any way until it has been published

Note
Options depend on type of review system used

*Note
If author produces published paper this may be handled as plagiarism (see plagiarism flow chart)

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