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

Author alleges reviewer misconduct

Thank author and say you will investigate

Retrieve files (submitted MS and reviews)

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

Open review (reviewer’s identity is disclosed to author)

Anonymous review (reviewer’s identity is NOT disclosed to author)

Author accuses actual reviewer of misconduct

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

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

Appears well-founded

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

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

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)

Discuss with author

Reviewer exonerated

Remove reviewer permanently from database and consider reporting case in journal

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

Keep author informed of progress

No reply/unsatisfactory explanation

Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation

Satisfactory explanation

Discuss with author/request further evidence

Author accuses actual reviewer of misconduct

Not well-founded

NB Do not forget people who refused to review

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

Contact reviewer’s institution requesting an investigation

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

Reviewer found guilty

Keep author informed of progress

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

Note
Options depend on type of review system used

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

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