These guidelines are intended to apply primarily to journal articles but may be applicable to book chapters, abstracts, preprints and other published documents.
THERE WILL BE SEPARATE GUIDELINES FOR

• Expressions of concern, letters to the editor and commentaries

• Corrigenda and errata
THE PURPOSE OF RETRACTION

Retraction is a mechanism for correcting the literature and alerting readers to articles that contain such seriously flawed or erroneous content or data that their findings and conclusions cannot be relied upon. Unreliable content or data may result from honest error, naïve mistakes, or research misconduct.

The main purpose of retraction is to correct the literature and ensure its integrity rather than to punish the authors.

Retractions may be used to alert readers to cases of redundant publication, plagiarism, peer review manipulation, reuse of material or data without authorisation, copyright infringement or some other legal issue (eg, libel, privacy, legality), unethical research, and/or a failure to disclose a major competing interest that would have unduly influenced interpretations or recommendations.
WHICH PUBLICATIONS SHOULD BE RETRACTED?

If only a small part of an article reports flawed data or content, this may be best rectified by a correction. Partial retractions are not helpful because they make it difficult to determine the status of the article and which parts may be relied upon. Similarly, if only a small section of an article (e.g., a few sentences in the discussion) is plagiarised, editors should consider a correction (which could note that text was used without appropriate acknowledgement and cite the source) rather than retracting the entire article, which may contain sound, original data.

If redundant publication occurs, the journal that published first may issue a Notice of Redundant Publication but should not retract the article unless there are other concerns such as the reliability of the data. Any journals that subsequently publish a redundant article should retract it and state the reason for the retraction. If an article is published in more than one journal (either online or in print) around the same time, precedence may be determined by the publication dates or the dates on which a licence to publish or copyright transfer agreement was signed by the authors.
WHAT FORM SHOULD A RETRACTION TAKE?

In general, a retraction notice should cover a single retracted article.

Retraction notices should mention the reasons and basis for the retraction to enable readers to understand why the article is unreliable and should also specify who is retracting the article and possibly how the matter came to the journal’s attention (claimants may be named only when they have given permission).

Whenever possible, editors should negotiate with authors and attempt to agree on a form of wording that is clear and informative to readers and acceptable to all parties. However, prolonged negotiations should not unreasonably delay retraction and editors should publish retractions even if consensus cannot be reached. Retraction notices should be published in all versions of the journal (i.e., print and/or online). It is helpful to include the authors and title of the retracted article in the retraction heading.

Retracted articles should be unmistakably identified as such in all online sources (e.g., on the journal website, on the original article, and any bibliographic databases).
WHO SHOULD ISSUE THE RETRACTION?

In some cases, retractions are issued jointly or on behalf of the journal’s owner (e.g., a learned society or publisher). However, since responsibility for the journal’s content rests with the editor, they should always have the final decision about retracting material. Editors may retract publications (or issue Expressions of Concern) even if all or some of the authors do not agree. Who is retracting the article should be clearly identified within the retraction notice.
HOW QUICKLY SHOULD AN ARTICLE BE RETRACTED?

Publications should be retracted as soon as possible after the editor is convinced that the publication is seriously flawed, misleading, or falls into any of the categories described above. Prompt retraction should minimize the number of researchers who cite the erroneous work, act on its findings, or draw incorrect conclusions such as from ‘double counting’ redundant publications in meta-analyses or similar instances. If an editor has convincing evidence that a retraction is required, they should not delay retraction simply because the authors are not cooperative. However, if an allegation of misconduct related to a potential retraction results in a disciplinary hearing or institutional investigation, it may be appropriate to wait for the outcome before issuing a retraction (but an Expression of Concern may be published in the interim).
WHAT SHOULD EDITORS DO IN THE FACE OF INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE ABOUT A PUBLICATION’S RELIABILITY?

If conclusive evidence about the reliability of a publication cannot be obtained, or will not be obtained for a significant period of time, retraction may not be appropriate, but an editor could consider publishing an Expression of Concern.
SHOULD RETRACTION BE APPLIED IN CASES OF DISPUTED AUTHORSHIP?

Authors sometimes request that articles are retracted when authorship is disputed after publication. If there is no reason to doubt the validity of the findings or the reliability of the data, it is not appropriate to retract a publication solely on the grounds of an authorship dispute. In such cases, the editor should inform those involved in the dispute that they cannot adjudicate in such cases but will be willing to publish a correction to the author/contributor list if the authors/contributors (or their institutions) provide appropriate proof that such a change is justified.
CAN AUTHORS DISSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM A RETRACTED PUBLICATION?

If retraction is due to the actions of some, but not all, authors of a publication, the Notice of Retraction should mention this when possible. However, authorship entails some degree of joint responsibility for the integrity of the reported research so it is not appropriate for authors names to be removed from a publication even if they were not directly culpable for the errors or actions that led to retraction.
ARE THERE GROUNDS FOR LEGAL PROCEEDINGS IF AN AUTHOR SUES A JOURNAL FOR RETRACTING, OR REFUSING TO RETRACT, A PUBLICATION?

Authors who disagree with a retraction (or whose request to retract a publication is refused) sometimes threaten journals and their editors with legal action. Concern over litigation can make editors reluctant to retract articles, especially in the face of opposition from authors.

Authors usually would not have grounds for taking legal action against a journal over retraction or an Expression of Concern if it follows a suitable investigation and proper procedures.
Legal issues - continued

Legal advice may be helpful to determine appropriate wording for a retraction notice to ensure that the text is not considered defamatory. In general, wording of retractions should be limited to proven facts. Retraction notices should not engage in speculation (such as about motives or elements that are unproven) and should avoid ad hominem or other personal attacks. Nevertheless, retraction notices should always mention the reason(s) for retraction, and a statement about misconduct findings may be included if they are properly attributed to the finding body (e.g., following an institutional or funder investigation). If authors consent to the wording of a retraction statement, this may provide a defence against a libel claim.
REPUBLISHING RETRACTED CONTENT

An author may republish some of the work if not all of the content was found to be unreliable. In order to do so transparently, authors should notify the editors of the new journal of the prior retraction and it is likely appropriate to cite the retraction, indicating why the work was flawed and what has been corrected in the new article. Permission to republish also needs to be agreed with the copyright holder of the retracted work.
Thank you!

— publicationethics.org —