

## Standard retraction form

*Hervé Maisonneuve, Université de Lyon, France, suggests a standard retraction form and would like feedback from COPE members.*

### **Background:**

Retractions are often used as a proxy for publication quality. Retractions have been studied with cohorts of various sizes over differing time periods.

Time after time these studies have pointed out that there is often no clearly stated reason for retraction and when given these reasons are often lacking in detail. The difficulty with interpretation has never been quantified, however an absence of explanation was cited for 5–12% of retraction notices.[1]

Following our study on retraction notices issued in 2013, we recommended the use of a retraction template.[2] This template would meet the pre-requisites for the COPE retraction guidelines[3] using very simple tick boxes: who is retracting the article, the reason for the retraction and history of errata/ expressions of concern. Then, a free text box would allow the editor to add any information they consider useful. A copy of the form can be downloaded here.

1. Decullier E, Samson G, Huot L. [Retractions due to errors and frauds]. *Presse Med.* 2012; 41(9 Pt 1): 847-52.
2. Decullier E, Huot L, Samson G, Maisonneuve H. Visibility of retractions: a cross-sectional one-year study. *BMC research notes.* 2013; 6: 238.
3. COPE. Retraction guidelines. 2009. [cited june 2014]; Available from: <http://www.publicationethics.org/files/retraction%20guidelines.pdf>

The topic was discussed at the COPE Forum on Tuesday 23 September.

### **COMMENTS FROM THE FORUM (23 September 2014) – NOTE, Comments do not imply formal COPE advice, or consensus.**

- Is the completed standard retraction form to be used as a tool for editors or is it to be published? If it is to be published, there could be some issues with the reasons for retraction, as the form does not have many options or allow for any subtlety in the reasons for retraction.
- The form could provide a very appropriate in house form for editors or editorial staff to complete, but for broader use, the form does not have the capacity to capture all of the necessary information.
- Publishing the completed form would not be helpful. But the form works well as a checklist for editors and could be useful when preparing a retraction notice.
- Additional fields which may be useful are the DOI and article title, along with a link to the article. The year should be expanded to 4 digits (to accommodate any retractions before the year 2000). The subject discipline could also be added to the form.
- The retraction notice should state whether or not the reason for retraction invalidates the data in the paper. This issue should be made clear.
- One aim of the form is to help people doing research on retractions, as there is often a lack of data on retractions. The researcher could start with the form and then follow-up by looking at the published notice.

- Will the form affect the publicly available notice?
- Ivan Oransky of Retraction Watch has partnered with Peer Review Evaluation (PRE) to improve access to information about retraction policies. In the coming months, they will be publishing guidelines for what they think should be included in retraction notices, and on how those notices should be publicized (<http://retractionwatch.com/2014/09/16/what-should-an-ideal-retraction-notice-look-like-we-want-your-input/>). Ideally it would be great if we could work together on a mutually agreed way forward. It would be great for all interested parties to work together to produce a template on what an ideal retraction notice should include, with linking to the COPE guidelines.

## COMMENTS POSTED ON THE WEBSITE

*Posted by Elizabeth Moylan, 17/9/2014*

This is a great idea! The Biology and Medical Editors at BioMed Central grapple with how much information to include in retraction notices. How about you include a link in your form to COPE guidelines on retractions (so that Editors 'confirm' if they are dealing with a retraction or not).

You might want some additional check boxes e.g. sometimes retractions could come from the Publisher, and sometimes there are other reasons to retract – e.g. failure to declare competing interests or the peer review process was compromised.

Finally, some suggested template text would go a long way to improving the actual detail of the retraction notice - bearing in mind the need to 'balance' revealing sufficient information and what we can legally say in a retraction notice.

We look forward to the forum discussion.

Elizabeth Moylan, Biology Editor, BioMed Central.

*Posted by Charon Pierson, 17/9/2014*

I like the idea of a form even if it only serves as a reminder to the editor of what needs to be available to readers as a retraction is discussed. I found the Retraction type section somewhat confusing. I can't tell what the comment "only one tick is allowed in this column" refers to because the section says that multiple reasons are allowed. I also think that Ethics is too broad as a category. I would suggest a more specific statement such as "lack of ethical oversight or approval"; I would also argue that lack of ethical oversight or approval could invalidate the results. Property or legal concern could also be more specific. In COPE's cases, the most common situation is that ownership of the data is in question. You could just add Other with an explanation line for any categories that do not fit within the boxes. In the section Retraction requested by, I would also add publisher - that is not always the same as the journal owner. The comments section at the end could serve as a spot to draft the retraction notice taking into account all the ticked boxes.

*Posted by Irene Hames, 19/9/2014*

In case not everyone's seen, Retraction Watch has a post this week asking 'What should an ideal retraction notice look like?' They mention COPE's coming discussion on the proposal for a standard retraction form and say they'll be adding a link as feedback. But as I can't see that yet, here it is so people can take a look at the comments building there <http://retractionwatch.com/2014/09/16/what-should-an-ideal-retraction-no...>

To avoid confusion and duplicated effort it would be great for all interested parties to work together to produce a template on what an ideal retraction notice should include, with linking to the COPE guidelines. Having a checklist form as part of this is a great idea.

A standard retraction notice template will be very helpful if a retraction database ever become a reality – maybe making it fit for purpose for such a database (and associated searching functionality, analysis etc) should be part of the discussion?

For a while I've wondered if one thing needs to be amended in the COPE guidelines – cases where an author or authors publish a paper without the permission of others involved in the work. The work reported is sound. Under the current guidelines this is, in my understanding, classified as an authorship dispute, and a correction is recommended for those. If there has been malicious intent/unethical behaviour then it doesn't seem right that the work should stand and may have serious implications for the other authors and their publication/dissemination plans for the work .

There seem to be more of these sorts of cases and some are being retracted. Can this be discussed and considered by COPE?