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COPE JOURNAL AUDIT |
☑ CORE PRACTICE CHECKLIST



PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION

COPE provides leadership in thinking on publication ethics and practical resources to educate and support members, and offers a professional voice in current debates.

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AUDIT YOUR JOURNAL: AN INTRODUCTION

As a condition of initial and continued COPE membership, members are asked to follow the [Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing](#) and to have robust and well-described, publicly documented practices as outlined in the [COPE Core Practices](#). However, it is important to periodically check that journal guidelines are up-to-date with current international trends and best practices. The COPE Journal Audit is designed to help editors identify areas of their journal's policies, processes or practices that may need to be revised so that they adhere to the [COPE Core Practices](#) as well as the latest version of the [Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing](#)

COPE recognises that journals vary, particularly in their budgets and resources, and that this affects the amount of time available to editors. There may also be differences in the most appropriate ways of preventing or handling ethical issues depending on the size of the journal staff, the resources available and the discipline covered. The aim of the COPE Journal Audit is not to prescribe specific policies or impose particular systems. On the contrary, it aims to prompt editors to think about a wide variety of ethical issues in research and its publication, decide which are relevant to their journals and then formulate their own guidelines and codes of conduct to best address them.

This is not a survey. You are not expected to share your findings with COPE, although we welcome suggestions for improving the audit and making it applicable to as many disciplines and publishing models as possible.

In the present version of the COPE Journal Audit we have provided links to COPE resources and the most relevant external resources. If you have suggestions for other resources or links that might be helpful, [please let us know](#).

Note

In 2017, for practical and inclusive reasons, the COPE Core Practices replaced the [COPE Code of Conduct](#) (which have now been retired and archived). COPE members who had adopted or adapted the previous COPE Code of Conduct for their journals are advised to use the COPE Journal Audit to create or update their own code of conduct or ethical publishing guidelines and ensure they are compatible with the COPE Core Practices.



1. ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

1.1 Journals should have a clearly described process for handling allegations, however they are brought to the journal's or publisher's attention

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - How you define research and publication misconduct, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others?
 - How you identify and prevent the publication of papers where research or publication misconduct has occurred?
 - How you handle cases of suspected misconduct, including the contact details of a designated contact person, timeline, when to seek legal advice, and when to involve [institutions](#) and [other journals](#)?
- Does your website include links to relevant [COPE resources](#) such as flowcharts?
- Do you train journal staff, editors and peer reviewers about ethical peer review and how to detect and report possible author misconduct, using relevant [COPE resources](#) (eg, [peer review manipulation](#), [peer reviewer guidelines](#))?
- Do you have an ethics panel/committee or an advisor/member of the editorial board with specific responsibility for ethical issues (eg, ombudsperson)?



1.2 Journals must take seriously allegations of misconduct pre-publication and post-publication

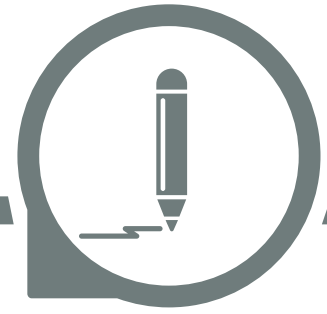
- Do you follow your policy and relevant [COPE flowcharts](#) in cases of suspected misconduct before and after publication?
- Do you follow [COPE guidelines on sharing information on possible misconduct with other journals](#)?
- When necessary, does your journal follow the [COPE retraction guidelines](#) to correct the scholarly record, leaving punitive action to institutions/employers?
- Do you refer complex cases of potential misconduct that cannot be resolved using [COPE flowcharts](#) to [COPE](#) after anonymisation (to [COPE Forum](#) or, between forums, direct to [COPE Council](#))?
- If you have referred a case to [COPE](#), have you provided feedback on the outcome (eg, to ensure the [COPE Forum cases database](#) is complete)?



1.3 Policies should include how to handle allegations from whistleblowers

- Do your journal office and website have policies on handling misconduct allegations made by whistleblowers?
- Does your website include links to, and do you follow, the [COPE flowcharts](#) on responding to misconduct allegations made by whistleblowers [directly](#) or on [social media](#)?





2. AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTORSHIP

2.1 Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship...

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - Authorship criteria?
 - Defining and disallowing ghost, guest and gift authors?
 - Acknowledging individuals who do not fulfil authorship criteria (including those providing writing assistance)?
- Does your journal require all authors to sign an authorship declaration rather than just the corresponding author?
- Do you acknowledge receipt of a submission by emailing all authors rather than just the corresponding author?
- Does your journal elicit and list individuals' contributions?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant resources, eg,
 - Industry initiatives (eg, [CRediT](#), [ORCID](#))?
 - [COPE discussion document on what constitutes authorship](#)?
 - [ICMJE guidelines on roles of authors/contributors](#)?



2.2 ...as well as processes for managing potential disputes

- Do your journal office and website have policies on handling potential authorship disputes before and after publication?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant [COPE resources](#) (eg, [potential authorship problems](#), [authorship flowcharts](#))?





3. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

3.1 Journals should have a clearly described process for handling complaints against the journal, its staff, editorial board or publisher

- Do you have a policy/process for handling appeals/complaints against editorial decisions? If so, do you publish details in your instructions to authors and website?
- Do you have a policy/process for handling complaints against non-editorial issues such as journal policies/processes? If so, do you publish details in your instructions to authors and website?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant **COPE resources** (eg, [flowchart on what to do if a reviewer is suspected of appropriating author material](#))?
- Do you have an independent ombudsperson or advisor to adjudicate complaints about journal processes that cannot be resolved internally?
- Do you refer complex cases that cannot be resolved using **COPE** flowcharts to **COPE** after anonymisation (to **COPE** Forum or, between forums, direct to **COPE** Council)?
- If you have referred a case to **COPE**, have you provided feedback on the outcome (eg, to ensure the **COPE** Forum cases database is complete)?





4. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST/ COMPETING INTERESTS

4.1 There must be clear definitions of conflicts of interest...

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - How you define conflicts of interest (including study funding)?
 - How you collect information on conflicts of interest from authors, journal staff, editors and reviewers?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant resources, eg, [ICMJE conflicts of interest disclosure forms](#)?



4.2 ...and processes for handling conflicts of interest of authors, reviewers, editors, journals and publishers, whether identified before or after publication

- Does your journal publicly display conflicts of interest statements (including if no conflicts exist):
 - About authors, in their publications?
 - About whether or not a study was funded, and any roles of the funder/s (eg, involvement in design, analysis, writing and control over publication)?
 - About the journal, journal staff, editors and reviewers, in the journal website? If so, are these up-to-date?
- For submissions from members of the journal's staff or editorial board:
 - Does your journal ensure an objective and unbiased evaluation? Is the procedure explained in the journal and its website?
 - Is the peer review process of affected submissions reported in the journal?
- Does your journal require reviewers to report:
 - Any potential conflicts of interest before agreeing to review a specific submission?
 - If any conflicts of interest became apparent during review?
 - If any potential author conflicts of interest became apparent during review?
- Does your journal disclose (anonymised) author conflicts of interest to reviewers during peer review?
- Do you have a procedure for handling submissions where:
 - Authors have clear conflicts of interest (eg, check for bias)?
 - Reviewers have clear conflicts of interest (eg, check for bias, find alternative reviewer)?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant [COPE resources](#) (eg, [COPE flowcharts on suspected undisclosed conflicts of interest](#) before or after publication)?





5. DATA AND REPRODUCIBILITY

5.1 Journals should include policies on data availability...

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on requiring authors:
 - To be prepared to submit (anonymised) underlying study data if requested by the journal for inspection or verification?
 - To include a statement in their submissions on data availability to readers (eg, whether and when study or additional data are available in supplementary files or repositories, accessibility or procedures for requesting data)?
 - To upload certain data (eg, biological sequences in a public repository as a condition of publication, or, if data are peer reviewed, to embargo uploaded data in a repository before manuscript submission and to submit a password to allow access by data peer reviewers)?
- Does your journal use and link to **COPE resources** on data and reproducibility and relevant international data sharing guidelines, such as **ICMJE** and **TOP** guidelines?
- Does your journal use relevant resources to check for data fabrication/falsification or data manipulation (eg, **COPE flowcharts**, **Journal of Cell Biology** article on image manipulation)?



5.2 ...and encourage the use of reporting guidelines and registration of clinical trials and other study designs according to standard practice in their discipline

- Does your journal encourage use of and link to international standard reporting guidelines such as those listed in the **EQUATOR Network**?
- Does your journal encourage pre-registration of clinical trials (and other study designs) in an online clinical study database before data are collected (eg, **ClinicalTrials.gov**)?
- Does your journal encourage journal pre-registration and peer review of study protocols before data are collected (eg, as promoted by the **Center for Open Science**)?
- Does your journal use and link to **ICMJE** guidelines on trial registration?





6. ETHICAL OVERSIGHT

6.1 Ethical oversight should include, but is not limited to, policies on consent to publication, publication on vulnerable populations, ethical conduct of research using animals, ethical conduct of research using human subjects, handling confidential data and ethical business/marketing practices

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - Requiring consent from adults and parents/guardians of minors for study participation and/or publication of their data?
 - Ethics related to publishing studies on vulnerable populations, eg, during humanitarian crises or health emergencies?
 - Requiring prior approval and ethical conduct of research involving humans or animals?
 - Pre-registration of human clinical trials and declaration of any altered protocol steps?
 - Handling and storing confidential study data and any personal data collected from authors/subscribers (do you need to comply with the [EU General Data Protection Regulation](#))?
 - Ensuring ethical business/marketing practices?
- Do you require proof, notification or statements of ethics approvals and ethical practices (eg, corresponding author makes declarations, copies of approvals, copy of template consent form, clinical trial site name and registration number)?
- Do you require a transparency statement from one author as guarantor to be published with the publication (eg, [as required by the BMJ](#))?
- Do you train journal staff, editors and peer reviewers how to detect and report possible author misconduct, using relevant **COPE** resources (eg, [peer review manipulation](#), [peer reviewer guidelines](#))?
- Do you have an ethics panel/committee or an advisor/member of the editorial board with specific responsibility for ethical issues (eg, ombudsperson)?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant **COPE resources** (eg, **COPE** flowchart on [a suspected ethical problem](#) and **COPE** guidelines on [consent for publishing medical case reports](#) and [research, audit and service evaluations](#))?





7. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

7.1 All policies on intellectual property, including copyright and publishing licenses, should be clearly described

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - Who owns the copyright of each article? Is the copyright holder shown on all published articles (HTML and PDF)?
 - Any licences that must be granted to the journal for publishing? Are licensing terms shown on all published articles (HTML and PDF)?
 - Any reuse (Creative Commons) licences? Is the Creative Commons licence shown on all published articles (HTML and PDF)?
- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on authors' rights to archive the accepted version of their work (postprint) or the final published article (version of record) in an institutional website, personal website or public repository?
- Has your journal updated its copyright and self-archiving policies on the [SHERPA/RoMEO](#) database?
- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on requiring authors to obtain and acknowledge copyright permission to use, reproduce or adapt any copyrighted material (including use of any copyrighted research tools)?



7.2 In addition, any costs associated with publishing should be obvious to authors and readers

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - Any author fees that are required for manuscript processing and/or publishing materials in the journal, including when and how much to pay and what the fees are for?
 - Special situations such as author fees are charged only if publishing under a gold open access option in a hybrid journal, or if a funder has mandated gold open access?
 - If there are any fee waivers or reductions?
 - If no fees whatsoever are charged?
 - If any refunds are allowed?
- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on the way/s in which the journal and individual articles are available to readers and whether there are associated subscription or pay per view fees?





7. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

7.3 Policies should be clear on what counts as prepublication that will preclude consideration

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - What counts and what does not count as prepublication (eg, preprints, trial preregistration, conference presentation)?
 - Declarations to be made about preprints and/or prior presentation?
- Has your journal updated its preprint policy on the [SHERPA/RoMEO](#) database?



7.4 What constitutes plagiarism and redundant/overlapping publication should be specified

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - How you define plagiarism and redundant/overlapping publication?
 - How you screen for and detect plagiarism?
 - How you reduce redundant publication (eg, requiring copies of similar submitted or published material to be submitted with a manuscript, requiring clinical trial registration numbers and checking for related papers)?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant [COPE resources](#) (eg, [COPE flowcharts](#) on suspected plagiarism in a [submitted](#) or [published](#) paper, or suspected redundancy in a [submitted](#) or [published](#) paper)?





8. JOURNAL MANAGEMENT

8.1 A well-described and implemented infrastructure is essential, including the business model, policies, processes and software for efficient running of an editorially independent journal,...

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on the journal's:
 - Publication and infrastructure (eg, frequency, aims and scope, intended readership, print/online ISSN, full journal contact details, use of **COPE** member's logo and links to **COPE**, inclusion in reputable indexes, article/media types and file formats accepted, supplementary files accepted, clear submission instructions, use of a secure manuscript submission platform, clear ethics and peer review policies, ownership/sponsorship, relationship with other journals/publishers/vendors, peer review/publication statistics, digital object identifier [DOI] assignment, any early-online versions)?
 - Governing body and editorial team (eg, editorial board or other governing body of recognised experts in relevant subject areas, with full names and affiliations, and policies/processes to ensure editorial independence)?
 - Business model (eg, publishing model, sponsorship, author fees, subscriptions, advertising, reprints, author services, [sponsored] supplements, institutional/organisational support and that publishing fees or waiver status should not influence editorial decision making?)
 - Advertising policies, if any (eg, what types of advertisements will be considered, who makes decisions regarding accepting advertisements, whether they are linked to content, whether they are linked to online reader behaviour or displayed at random, and that advertisements should not be related in any way to editorial decision making and shall be kept separate from published content)?
 - Direct marketing, if any (eg, solicitation of manuscripts conducted on behalf of the journal is appropriate, well targeted and unobtrusive, and information provided about the publisher or journal is truthful and not misleading for readers or authors)?
 - Permanent online archiving (eg, CLOCKSS, Portico, or PubMed Central) in the event that a journal is no longer published?





8. JOURNAL MANAGEMENT

8.2 ...as well as the efficient management and training of editorial boards and editorial and publishing staff

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on the journal's election of editor/s and editorial board members to ensure editorial independence?
- Are all journal staff, editors and reviewers:
 - Instructed to never encourage research or publication misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place?
 - Trained to efficiently carry out duties and use relevant software such as the submission/peer review platform?
 - Trained in publishing ethics and manuscript screening according to relevant guidelines (eg, international reporting guidelines listed in the **EQUATOR Network**)?
- Does your journal consult and link to relevant **COPE resources** (eg, **COPE guidelines for board of directors**, **COPE sample letters**) and relevant guidelines (eg, **RePAIR Consensus Guidelines**)?
- Does your journal train new editors and staff, eg, with **COPE short guide for new editors**, **Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing**, and the **COPE eLearning course**?
- Are journal editors and staff encouraged to take part in continuous professional development, such as join live **COPE seminars and webinars** or to access the recordings?





9. PEER REVIEW PROCESSES

9.1 All peer review processes must be transparently described and well managed

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - The journal's peer review procedures?
 - Independence of editorial decisions from financial ones (eg, advertising, author fees)?
 - Procedures for any fast-track review system?
 - If and how authors can recommend peer reviewers or request that certain people not be peer reviewers?
 - Whether peer review involves external reviewers or only editorial board members?
 - What peer reviewers look for and what is expected of peer reviewers?
 - The confidentiality of peer review?
 - What types of content are peer reviewed?
 - Possible outcomes of peer review and how they are relayed to the author/s?
 - Average peer review and production times, and acceptance/rejection rates?
 - Whether readers are informed at the article level about the article's origin (commissioned or not), whether it was peer reviewed, peer review/production times, and date of online-first publication?
 - Appeals/complaints procedure?
- Do your journal office and website have detailed peer reviewer guidelines, including expected turnaround times, if potential impact is a criterion, whether they are allowed to contact the authors, whether they are allowed to seek peer review assistance, whether there are template forms, whether confidential notes/scores/recommendations to the editor are expected/allowed, and that the editor makes decisions on acceptance/rejection?
- Are the following absent from your journal guidelines and website:
 - Promises of very short peer review times?
 - Guarantees of acceptance?
 - Financial conditions of acceptance?
 - The need to use a journal's or publisher's paid author services as a condition of acceptance?





9. PEER REVIEW PROCESSES

9.2 Journals should provide training for editors and reviewers...

- Do you refer novice or potential reviewers to free general online peer-review training courses like those of [Publons](#) or [American Chemical Society Reviewer Lab](#)?
- Do you train editors and peer reviewers about:
 - How to use your peer review platform, if any?
 - How to review for your journal?
 - How to write the review report?
 - Declaring conflicts of interest and areas of expertise and, if needed, declining a review request?
 - Ethical peer review, including confidentiality, not using or sharing author material, and whether reviewers may contact authors or invite people to assist them in the review?
 - Peer reviewing special aspects such as figures/tables, statistics, supplementary material, data?
- Do you encourage reviewers to comment on:
 - Ethical questions (eg, protection of patients/animals, evidence of adherence to appropriate standards, clinical trial pre-registration, consent from humans for study participation and/or publication of data)?
 - Possible research misconduct (eg, data fabrication/falsification)
 - Possible publication misconduct (eg, redundant publication, plagiarism, undeclared conflicts of interest)
 - Reviewer conflicts of interest that became apparent during review?
 - Any portions of a manuscript that they did not/could not review?
 - If, during double-blind review, they discovered the identity of the author/s?
- Do you grade or give feedback on report quality to reviewers, show them other reviews, inform them of the review outcome?
- Do you train journal staff, editors and peer reviewers to check submissions against relevant guidelines (eg, international reporting guidelines listed in the [EQUATOR Network](#))?
- Do you consult and use relevant [COPE resources](#) (eg, [what to consider when asked to review](#), [peer review manipulation](#), [peer reviewer guidelines](#))?



9. PEER REVIEW PROCESSES

9.3 ...and have policies on diverse aspects of peer review, especially with respect to adoption of appropriate models of review and processes for handling conflicts of interest, appeals and disputes that may arise in peer review

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - Peer review model/s used and why, if authors have a choice of peer review model and if reviewers have a choice of making their identity known (“signing” reviews)?
 - How journal transfer (cascading review), if any, is done?
 - How you select your peer reviewer pool?
 - How you select reviewers for each manuscript, if you allow authors to make recommendations of peer reviewers or request that certain people not be peer reviewers, and if/how you honour those recommendations/requests?
 - How to handle author and peer reviewer conflicts of interest?
 - How submissions authored by editorial staff/editors are reviewed?
 - Use of a secure submission/peer review management system to increase peer review efficiency and record keeping?
 - How you track and reward peer reviewers? Do you publicly list them periodically, or collaborate with peer review databases like [Publons](#)?
 - Copyright and confidentiality of peer review reports (see [COPE Discussion Document on who owns peer reviews](#))?
 - Possible use of post-publication peer review in cases of misconduct identified post publication such as peer review manipulation?
 - How you handle appeals, complaints and disputes that arise during or after peer review (including appealing against a peer review decision, suspected coerced citation, or [if a reviewer is suspected of appropriating author material](#))?





10. POST-PUBLICATION DISCUSSIONS AND CORRECTIONS

10.1 Journals must allow debate post publication either on their site, through letters to the editor, or on an external moderated site, such as PubPeer

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on methods of post-publication debate:
 - Through your journal website?
 - Through letters to the editor or commentaries (including a description of how they are handled editorially and if authors have an opportunity to respond)?
 - On external websites such as PubPeer?
 - In your journal's social media accounts?



10.2 They must have mechanisms for correcting, revising or retracting articles after publication

- Do your journal office and website have detailed guidelines on:
 - How requests for corrections, revisions and retractions can be made?
 - How such requests are investigated?
 - When retraction-and-replacement is appropriate?
 - How corrections and retractions are made and labelled, identified in the journal and indexing systems (eg, with Correction or Retraction in the title) and linked to the original article in the journal website and indexing systems?
 - How readers are notified (eg, in a Table of Contents, without a paywall)?
- Do you have systems in place to handle:
 - Honest errors (eg, by publishing corrections)
 - Concerns about publications that have not been conclusively proven but are sufficiently serious to warrant warning potential readers (eg, by issuing a statement of concern)
 - Cases of publication misconduct that do not involve the reliability of the data, such as duplicate submission/publication (eg, by publishing a notice of redundant publication)
 - Proven cases of serious research misconduct warranting retraction (eg, fabricated data, major plagiarism, undeclared conflicts of interest)
 - Requests from organisations (eg, Office for Research Integrity in the USA)?
- Does your journal follow relevant **COPE flowcharts** to investigate possible cases of misconduct and refer complex cases to **COPE**?
- When necessary, does your journal follow the **COPE retraction guidelines** to correct the scholarly record, leaving punitive action to institutions/employers?



AUDIT YOUR JOURNAL

This COPE Journal Audit is based on the following sources:

1. COPE Core Practices. <https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>

(Note: In 2017, the COPE Core Practices replaced the **COPE Code of Conduct** (now retired and archived), but COPE members are expected to develop their own code of conduct; the Core Practices should be considered alongside specific national and international codes of conduct for research and are not intended to replace them.)

2. Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (revised 15 January 2018)

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing>

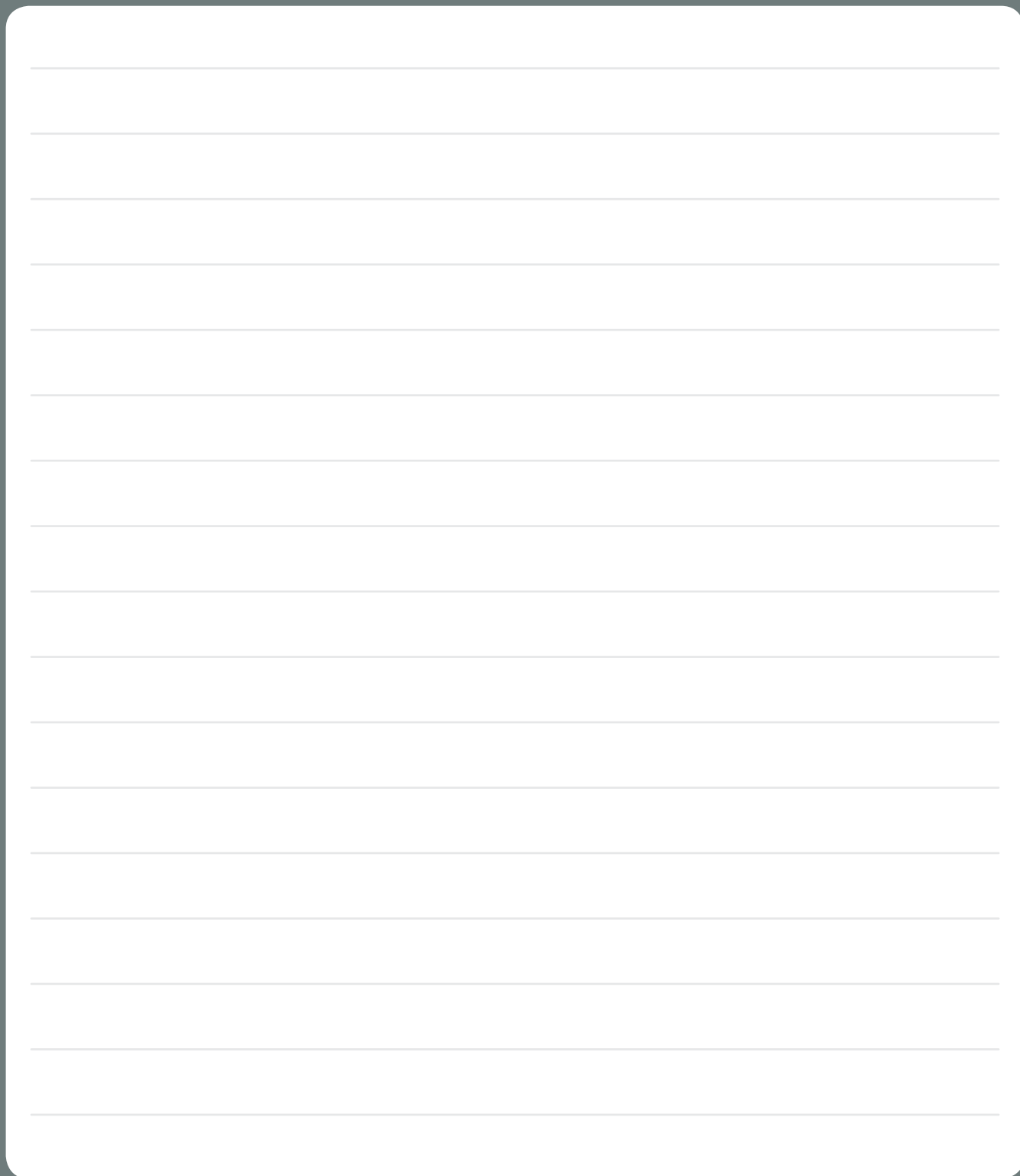
Version 1: October 2018

This internal audit is for COPE members only.

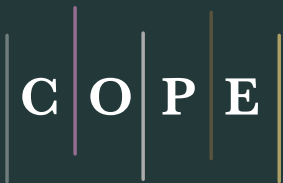
For more information: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/audit>

NOTES

NOTES



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