



C O P E

## Practical tips on managing paper mills

COPE Webinar  
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[publicationethics.org](https://publicationethics.org)

## Who runs paper mills?

Individual or groups of researchers

Third party agencies

Openly operating paper mill businesses

## How do paper mills work?

Manuscripts are generated

- Fabrication
- Call for submissions (special issues)
- Stolen

Publication is guaranteed

- Take over the peer review process to ensure that manuscripts are accepted
- Offer editors bribes to accept manuscripts
- Target vulnerable journals

Collect payment

- Offer authorship for sale
- Receive payment for publication

## How are paper mills detected?

Field experts

Detect fabricated data in published articles

Publishers

Suspicious patterns of behaviour in publication workflows and databases

Editors

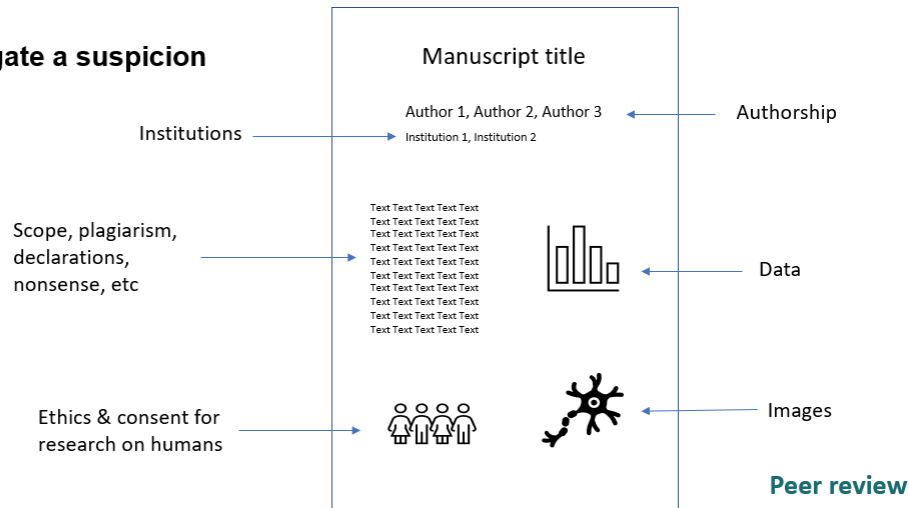
'Red flags' in manuscript content

## New tools

## How to investigate a suspicion

### Journal level

#### Content



## Remember

- A single manuscript might not show enough to indicate a paper mill.
- Look for similar features across a number of manuscripts.



# Recap from 2021 Seminar

PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN SCHOLARLY  
RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION

## Managing a papermill

### Common questions

Should you ask for raw data?

Should you involve institutions?

Can you publish an expression of concern or a retraction?  
If so, which?

## Institutions

### Retract or publish an expression of concern?

#### COPE retraction guidelines

For example:

- Peer review manipulation
- Unethical research
- Plagiarism
- Unreliable findings

#### Expression of concern

- When findings are less clear-cut, but concerns remain
- Subjective judgement on how far the reported research is undermined

**\*New COPE guidelines under development**

Consider informing institutions that you are investigating a paper mill

## How to avoid publishing paper mill manuscripts

Paper mills test your systems and processes

They look for areas that are weak or where no-one's watching

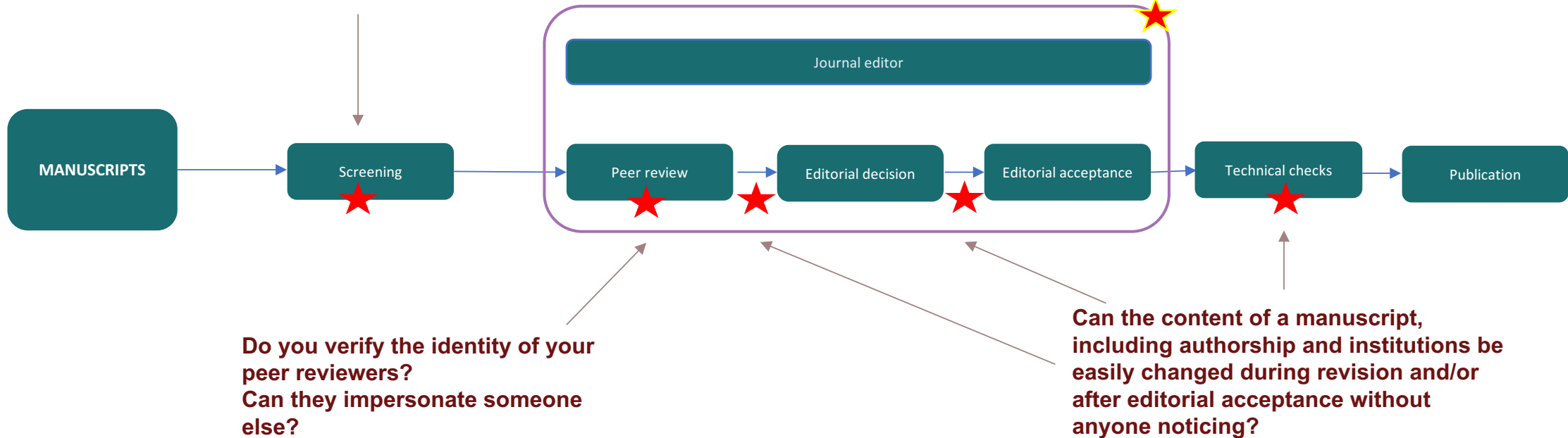
**Know the vulnerabilities of your own processes**

# Checking for vulnerabilities

PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN SCHOLARLY RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION

Do you check for potential plagiarism, image or data fabrication? Or for patterns of unusual behaviour across your submissions and other journals?

Do you: Check their identity and expertise? Tell them your expected standards? Monitor what they do?



Does everyone involved in processing manuscripts understand what paper mills are, what to look out for and how to flag their suspicions?

## Practical tips

### How to avoid publishing paper mill manuscripts

Be aware of how manipulation of the publication process works.

Know what to look for in individual manuscripts, publication workflows and databases.

Raise awareness across departments (not just an editorial issue).

## Practical tips

### How to avoid publishing paper mill manuscripts

- Screen on submission **and** throughout manuscript processing including after editorial acceptance.
- Screen across submissions and journals.
- Monitor what you publish.
- Make sure your peer review process is secure.
- Make sure guest editors are aware of expected standards for editorial decision making and peer review and check their compliance.



## Practical tips

### How to manage paper mills

- Use COPE guidance on paper mills to gather information and help decision making.
  - Can the institution help with an investigation or will that cause delays?
  - Do you need the raw data? If so, be as specific as possible and make sure you have a plan to review the data.
- Use COPE retraction guidelines to help make decisions on retractions verses expressions of concern.
- Look out for more COPE guidance.



## COPE resources

### COPE retraction guidelines:

<https://publicationethics.org/retraction-guidelines>



### NEW COPE Systematic manipulation of the publication process flowcharts:

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts/systematic-manipulation-publication-process>



### How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process:

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts/how-recognise-potential-manipulation-peer-review-process>



### COPE forum discussion on Expressions of Concern:

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/forum-discussions/expressions-of-concern>



**THANK YOU**  
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