

# What Every Author Should Know About Redundant and Duplicate Publication

**R**edundant (or duplicate) publication is publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published in print or electronic media (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors [ICMJE], 2004, III.D.2). Also called “self-plagiarism,” it is a violation of publishing ethics. Publishers and editors have given much recent attention to this increasing problem, but many authors remain unaware of guidelines published in the past decade. Authors bear a great burden when a judgment of duplicate publication occurs. Authors of any document for publication should know how to define redundant or duplicate publication, why it is a problem, what happens in an investigation of it, what the penalties are for it, and particularly how to avoid it.

Although the terms redundant and duplicate differ, they are used interchangeably in regard to publication. ICMJE’s guidelines (<http://www.icmje.org/#over>) include both terms, but the section for authors’ attention is entitled “redundant publication.” When a notice is published with articles listed in PubMed, the term is “duplicate publication.”

## The Problem of Redundant or Duplicate Publication

Publishing the same information twice or more is a problem in many ways. Unless properly presented, it is a violation of copyright laws. It requires disproportionate human resources for reviewing, editing, and if necessary for investigating possible duplicate publication. It consumes double the necessary amount of limited journal space, thereby precluding or delaying timely publication of other articles. It complicates the work of other researchers and authors, such as in double-counting the results of a single study in meta-analyses or integrative reviews of literature (DeAngelis, 2004). Publishing the same work more than once might be an advantage to an author, for example, if a faculty committee simply counts the number of articles in refereed journals as a criterion for promotion; however, in other universities the author might lose credibility for “padding” a curriculum vitae with redundant publications.

Although duplicate publication has been defined internationally for at least a decade, recognition of it is still limited. One member of the JNS Editorial Board said it is regarded as a serious problem in her country and sanctions are applied when it occurs. Another board member said duplicate publication is not regarded as a problem in her country. Recent

cases cited in medical journals and on the internet indicate that information about it is now available globally. Readers interested in more information from various sources should search via PubMed, MEDLINE, and CINAHL for the many references available online.

## Why It Occurs

Redundant publication is most likely the result of pressure to publish. Editors call it the “salami slicer syndrome;” authors divide their findings from a single study into minimally publishable pieces. For example, I have received queries and manuscripts from authors proposing multiple articles from a single study. A frequent proposal is to present theoretical perspectives in one paper and the methods and results in another. More extreme, some authors have proposed separate manuscripts on the theoretical framework, the review of literature, the methods, and the results of the study.

In some cases multiple articles are appropriate if extensive and varied new information resulted from a study. The problem, however, is the ease of slipping into redundancy. In most cases, one integrated and comprehensive article is preferable and sufficient. Although authors often complain that page limits are the reason for submitting multiple papers, every long manuscript can be condensed, usually without loss of significant information.

Certain types of papers are not considered publications for purposes of defining duplicate publication, including theses and dissertations, brief abstracts in conference proceedings, presentations at scientific meetings, and reports to funding agencies. Whenever in doubt about a manuscript, authors should inform editors of any questions and provide the appropriate information.

## Investigation of Possible Duplicate Publication

No uniform standards and procedures for investigating duplicate publication are available, but some are implied in the ICMJE’s uniform requirements for manuscripts (ICMJE, 2004). Editors work together whenever they notice or receive reports of possible duplicate publication. Editors handle communications with authors and publishers, review the possibly duplicate papers, invite reviews from members of editorial boards and sometimes from additional independent reviewers, consider all facts to make the decision about duplicate publication, and, when necessary, write the

notice of duplicate publication as information for indexing services. Many editors now scan new manuscripts carefully and question authors about possible redundant publication before proceeding with reviews.

### Penalties for Duplicate Publication

If redundancy is recognized before publication, manuscripts are rejected. If redundant articles have already been published, the visible penalties are publication of a notice of duplicate publication in both journals, notification of the authors' employers, and notation in indexes such as PubMed. In extreme cases, one of the redundant articles might be retracted, even after publication. Editors usually ask authors for a written statement about the redundancy to be published with the notice of duplicate publication.

Sometimes an author includes another person as co-author without that person's knowledge or agreement. The first author might consider this action a gesture of gratitude, but it is a serious violation of publishing ethics. All authors listed on a paper must participate in preparation of the manuscript for publication and must agree to accept accountability for the content of the paper. Penalties apply to all authors listed on a manuscript and are applied regardless of status, including students.

### Four Scenarios

Four scenarios illustrate how authors' dilemmas can lead to redundant publication: (a) a new graduate publishing papers from a dissertation; (b) a researcher reporting on a longitudinal program of study; (c) an author writing in different languages; and (d) an author writing for different audiences.

First, after completing a dissertation, a new graduate, often with encouragement of a well-meaning supervisory committee, publishes not one but several articles, citing the dissertation. A dissertation or thesis is not a published document, so publishing the findings of the study is appropriate, and is even required in some European universities. However, publishing several articles from the same database might be criticized as "salami slicing," or it might be judged as redundant publication, with penalties imposed by publishers and editors. Penalties are especially likely when authors fail to cite other manuscripts from the same study or sign the copyright-assignment forms indicating that the content of a manuscript is original and has not been submitted elsewhere.

Second, a researcher with a program of study over many years builds knowledge from one study to the next and reports the findings in multiple articles. As long as each article contains new information, particularly from different databases, the author is not likely to be questioned about redundant publication, and instead would be commended for advancing scientific and professional knowledge. However,

presenting new information is critical, as is describing early in a subsequent manuscript how it extends but differs from previous work. A red flag to editors and often to reviewers is citation of largely the author's own work. If authors copy text from their own publications without proper citation, it constitutes self-plagiarism. The content of almost all journal articles and books is copyrighted, and copyrighted text may not be used in other publications without the publisher's permission.

Third, an author has published an article in one language and wants to translate it for publication in another language. This practice is increasingly common, and, if done appropriately, it can benefit readers in both languages. However, without proper citation of the original article and permission of the publisher, the second publication constitutes a violation of copyright law. Merely citing the original article in the list of references is not adequate. Although the standards about duplicate publication are international, they are not widely known or used in many countries. Authors from any country should be aware of these standards because they are now in use in the US and Europe, including for JNS manuscripts.

Fourth, an author believes the findings of an analysis pertain to different audiences. For example, results of a study of people with diabetes mellitus might have different implications for nurses in critical care, community health, and nursing education. Publishing the same results in journals for different audiences is very likely regarded as redundant publication. To avoid duplication, the author could (a) include the multiple implications in a single article in a widely distributed journal, or (b) publish one comprehensive article with all the background and results of the study, and query editors of specialty journals about subsequent manuscripts focused specifically on their readers. If the latter approach is chosen, authors should give full information about the published article(s) and secure editors' agreement before proceeding.

### How to Avoid Duplicate Publication

Implicit in the above information are ways to avoid duplicate publication:

- Cite all related papers, including those submitted but not yet accepted;
- Be clear in submitting a manuscript what new information it contains;
- Understand what conditions all authors listed on a manuscript endorse in giving permission to publish a manuscript;
- Give preference to publishing a potentially "classic" and comprehensive article instead of dissecting results into minimally publishable pieces;
- Challenge criteria for promotion that indicate greater emphasis on quantity than quality of publications.

Few if any authors cited for duplicate publication had the intent to deceive. Many people are genuinely unaware of

what constitutes duplicate publication. However, when investigated, the evidence is authors' actions, not their intent, and "ignorance of the law" does not excuse authors from scrutiny and sanctions.

I hope the above information will help authors avoid redundant or duplicate publication. Knowledge of publishing norms, laws, and ethics can enable authors to prevent these problems and remain enthusiastic about publishing findings that are important for advancing nursing knowledge.

## References

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- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2004). **Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: Writing and editing for biomedical publication**. Retrieved July 11, 2005, from <http://www.icmje.org/#over>

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