

EDITORIAL

AMS Policy on Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism


One of the foundations of science is that published work be an original contribution by the named author or authors. As global science grows, more authors are encouraged to publish, more papers are being published, and the pressure to publish increases. Authors submitting manuscripts to the journals of the American Meteorological Society (AMS) must confirm to AMS that the work has not been published in other journals. As a requirement to enter peer review, authors also should have read and accepted the conditions of “Author Disclosure and Obligations” at www.ametsoc.org/PUBSAuthorObligations. Items 5–7 discuss plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and fragmentation and are reproduced below.

5. It is unethical for an author to copy text, figures, or tables (i.e., plagiarize) from other work without attribution. Even self-plagiarism (or autoplagerism), defined as copying from previous work by the author, could be considered unethical as it may involve copyright infringement (i.e., as a condition of publication in AMS journals, authors are required to transfer intellectual property rights to the AMS—hence, authors no longer “own” previously published work).
6. Fragmentation of research papers should be avoided. A scientist who has done extensive work on a topic or a group of related topics should organize publications so that each paper gives a complete account of a particular aspect of the general study.
7. It is unethical for an author to publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one peer-reviewed paper.

The ease of searching the Internet and the desire to stop duplicate work from being published has led to resources available to publishers to identify possible plagiarism. Over the past three years, AMS has been experimenting with one of these resources: CrossCheck. CrossCheck is a similarity-detection product of CrossRef, which is a nonprofit collaboration of commercial and professional society publishers. CrossCheck uses the iThenticate software produced by iParadigms, which has also developed the similar service Turnitin for academic purposes. All manuscripts submitted to AMS journals now are processed through CrossCheck. The resulting reports are made available to the responsible chief editors of the journals.

To ensure consistent application of CrossCheck results across all journals, the Publications Commission formed a subcommittee to explore the standards for plagiarism and recommend guidance for the journals. This editorial summarizes those standards. The material below is intended to provide more specifics to items 5–7 above to clarify what is meant by plagiarism and self-plagiarism.

- 1) Effective communication in science requires clear and precise descriptions, often involving technical words and phrases. Duplication of technical words and phrases from other source material amounting to less than a sentence shall not be construed as plagiarism, in general.
- 2) Directly quoted material surrounded by quotation marks or indented as block quotes and cited to the original source is not considered plagiarism. There are some circumstances in which the use of quotations, particularly lengthy ones, may require permission from

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- a copyright proprietor. Direct quotation and acknowledgment of the source may avoid claims of plagiarism, but copyright issues should be considered separately.
- 3) Duplication of text from a nonpeer-reviewed source, provided that it was written by one of the authors of the submission (e.g., most conference preprints, project progress reports, personal or project websites, dissertations), will not constitute plagiarism, in general. (However, permission from a copyright proprietor may still be required.) In such cases, authors should disclose the prior informal publication of this work either as a citation in the text or as a mention in the acknowledgments if the past work is not publicly available.
 - 4) Excluding items 1–3, duplication of unquoted text (either cited or uncited)—even if the similar text includes changed verb tense, different numerical values, and the use of synonyms, for example—is generally considered to be plagiarism and is unacceptable within AMS journals.
 - 5) Self-plagiarism occurs when substantial amounts of text previously published by the same author are used without citation and without quotation. In practice, some similarity or duplication of text may be deemed acceptable (if properly cited), particularly when describing equations, data, or methods where similarity is essential to convey consistency across multiple papers or to convey precision. To avoid self-plagiarism, sections containing duplicate or similar text must (i) appropriately cite the original source to promote the primacy of the source and (ii) indicate that the text largely follows directly from that source [e.g., “The description of the dataset parallels that of Smith et al. (1980) as follows in the next two paragraphs.” or “The methods are the same as employed in Smith et al. (2008), and the following text is derived from there with minor modifications.”]. Editors will determine the acceptability of such cases of duplicate or similar text and may provide guidance to authors about how to avoid self-plagiarism.
 - 6) How AMS peer-review editors handle such instances is left to their discretion. Severe cases may result in outright rejection of the manuscript with no chance for resubmission. Other actions may be taken as well. Minor cases may be pointed out to the author in the initial decision letter with the requirement that revisions be made.

Authors are encouraged to examine the reference material below that was used in the construction of the AMS policy on plagiarism.

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