

Quality over quantity

Duplicate publication dilutes science and we strive to avoid it.

You have polished the text of your new manuscript and are ready to submit it to *Nature Photonics*. We have highlighted in a previous editorial the need for fair citation, giving due credit and avoiding plagiarism¹, but there are a couple of things about our policies on duplicate publication that may easily slip your mind, or that you could be completely unaware of. In particular, when should you inform the editors about related manuscripts of yours that are under consideration elsewhere? Can you submit similar work or part of the work to other journals while waiting for the decision from us?

If the topic of the related material is akin to that of your manuscript submitted to us, the short answer is, more often than not, 'no'. Our publication policies are available online in both HTML² and PDF³ format. Within you will find, not surprisingly, that material submitted to us should be largely original and unpublished, although there are of course exceptions to this rule, as discussed below. When talking about duplicate publication, we need to keep in mind that it is not always a simple case of verbatim reproduction of large sections of text or results. Even duplication of concepts, claims and implications can constitute a problem¹.

To avoid duplicate publication, we require authors submitting manuscripts to the journal to let us know about any other relevant manuscripts they have under consideration elsewhere at the time of submission^{3,4}. Authors should provide us with a copy of the related material. Surprising to some is the fact that we also require authors to inform us if they submit related material elsewhere after the time of submission to *Nature Photonics*. If in doubt about whether or not something is relevant, you should send us a copy of the other material, to be on the safe side. The editor assigned to the manuscript will determine whether or not the related material is too similar or whether it causes any other concerns. Even without obvious duplication, related material can compromise the novelty of results or claims in a submitted manuscript. However, very often, there is no problem at all.

It is possible, in some cases, to republish in part some material "if the main result, conclusion, or implications are not apparent from the other work"⁴. Re-using a figure



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from elsewhere is possible providing that permission from the copyright holder is obtained. It also might be acceptable to reproduce something that was published in a language other than English. In all of these cases, the authors should explain the situation in the cover letter at the time of submission. Material that formed part of an academic thesis published as part of a requirement for an institutional qualification is also publishable in the journal.

After sending a paper to be reviewed, or even after publishing, we sometimes learn that authors have not told us about their related publications. Sometimes we find out by ourselves and at other times referees or other third parties inform us of their concerns. In all cases, we conduct a preliminary investigation and determine whether editorial policy has been violated and whether the work in question constitutes a case of duplicate publication or plagiarism. We might also consult experts and referees.

If a problem is confirmed, it could result in a number of actions ranging in severity up to the rejection (if the work has not yet been published) or retraction of the paper. We also contact the author's institute and funding agencies.

Relevant to the discussion here is something we are often asked about — the

use of preprint servers. We request that you let us know if you have posted the manuscript anywhere, but generally you are welcome to post pre-submission versions of the manuscript on a personal blog or a preprint server. However, pre-accepted versions of the manuscript that have been drafted as part of our editorial process should not be posted. The author's accepted version can be posted six months after publication, but the copyedited version formatted in *Nature Photonics* style may not.

With regards to posting online any version of the manuscript, authors should keep in mind our pre-publicity policies, which state that advertising contents of any contribution before publication could lead to rejection. Therefore, preprint manuscripts should not appear on a forum widely publicized outside the scientific community^{2,3} (in particular to the media).

Indeed, there are a lot of things to keep in mind. If a reader or author is in doubt about our policies or procedures, or has a suggestion, an editor will be more than happy to hear from you. □

References

1. *Nature Photon.* 3, 237 (2009).
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