Policy of Academic Journals Towards AI-generated Content

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2025

1 Introduction and Background

The integration of artificial intelligence technologies into academic research has created new challenges for scholarly publishing. As large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Claude, and others have become increasingly sophisticated, academic journals have been forced to develop policies regarding AI-generated content in research papers and academic manuscripts. These policies address fundamental questions about authorship, disclosure requirements, and the appropriate boundaries of AI usage in scholarly publishing.

The emergence of powerful generative AI tools has prompted significant concern within the academic community about potential misuse, including plagiarism, fabrication of content, and diminished research quality. In response, many major academic publishers and journals have begun establishing formal guidelines that aim to balance the potential benefits of AI assistance with the need to maintain research integrity, transparency, and proper attribution. These policies are evolving rapidly as the capabilities of AI systems continue to advance and as the academic community gains more experience with these technologies.

Academic journals are grappling with how to address AI-generated content in scholarly publications as large language models become more sophisticated. Recent guidelines from major publishers aim to establish standards for responsible AI use while maintaining research integrity.

2 Current Journal Policies on AI Authorship

The consensus among major academic publishers is definitive: generative AI tools cannot be listed as authors or co-authors of scholarly publications [27] [2] [15]. A comprehensive analysis of publisher policies revealed that of the 24% of top publishers with specific AI guidelines, 96% explicitly prohibit AI authorship [11]. This prohibition extends across disciplines, with all 14 of the top 20 veterinary medicine journals that have AI guidelines unanimously advising against listing AI as a co-author [8].

The rationale for excluding AI from authorship is grounded in established authorship criteria. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), whose standards are endorsed by major publishers like Springer Nature, mandates that authors must be able to take ownership of published work, declare potential competing interests, and participate in copyright agreements [2]. Publishers such as MIT Press and De Gruyter emphasize that AI tools "cannot take responsibility for the submitted work" and therefore cannot satisfy the fundamental requirements of authorship [23].

Elsevier's policy explicitly states that "authorship entails obligations and accountability that only human beings can fulfill," including ensuring work integrity, approving final versions, verifying originality, and assuming legal liability [15]. This position emerged after several incidents where researchers attempted to include ChatGPT as a co-author, including at least four preprints submitted to Nature [24].

Despite the prohibition on AI authorship, most publisher policies do not disallow the use of AI tools to assist with writing [23]. In fact, among journals with specific guidelines, only 1% explicitly prohibit using generative AI in manuscript preparation [11]. The Nature portfolio, while forbidding AI authorship, allows the use of generative AI to edit grammar and improve readability with proper acknowledgment [26].

However, there remains significant variation in publisher policies. While Science family journals prohibit both AI authorship and the use of AI-produced content (text, images, figures, graphics) in papers [16] [30], Springer Nature allows AI assistance with proper documentation [23]. Some publishers, like Elsevier, specifically note that their policies apply only to the writing process, not the research process itself [31].

There is also ongoing debate about whether attribution is necessary when AI is used simply as a tool to enhance writing and grammar rather than generating entirely new content [17]. As publishers continue to refine their approaches, it appears that each will maintain discretion over specific policies regarding permissible AI use in various aspects of manuscript preparation [17] [18].

Academic journals broadly prohibit listing AI tools as authors, requiring instead disclosure of AI use in manuscript preparation. Despite consensus on this core principle, there is significant variation in how journals implement disclosure requirements and the extent to which they allow AI assistance in different aspects of the writing process.

3 Disclosure Requirements

Transparency has emerged as a fundamental principle in academic journals' policies regarding AI-generated content. The vast majority of journals now require authors to explicitly disclose when and how they use AI tools in the preparation of manuscripts [11] [31]. Among the top 100 highest-ranked scientific journals, 87% provide specific guidelines on AI disclosure requirements for authors [11].

These disclosure policies typically specify that authors must identify the AI tool used, including version number, date accessed, and manufacturer/creator name, along with a detailed description of how and for which parts of the submission the tools were used [13]. Such requirements have been endorsed by major academic organizations including the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), and World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) [13] [26].

There is considerable variation in where disclosures should appear. Publisher guidelines may instruct authors to place AI disclosures in the methods section, acknowledgments section, cover letter, or in some cases, a new dedicated section specifically for AI use [11]. For example, Elsevier requires "the appropriate disclosure... at the bottom of the paper in a separate section before the list of references" [5], while Nature requires increased transparency with any use of generative AI to be documented in the Methods section [26].

Many journals distinguish between substantial content generation and basic editing assistance. JAMA Network journals, for instance, exclude "basic grammar, spelling, and reference-checking tools" from their declaration requirements [1]. Similarly, the top veterinary medicine journals specify that their disclosure recommendations typically do not apply to basic grammar and editing tools [8].

Some researchers advocate for more specific guidance regarding the acceptable proportion of AI-generated content in academic papers. They argue that editorial policies should clarify what percentage of NLP-generated content is permissible, and that excessive use should be considered academic misconduct [29] [3]. This reflects broader concerns about maintaining research integrity while acknowledging the growing role of AI tools in scholarly work.

The primary rationale for these disclosure requirements is to prevent unintentional plagiarism and ensure research integrity. Since AI systems generate text based on large datasets, there is always a risk that AI-generated content might closely resemble existing works [32] [25]. Transparency about AI use helps authors avoid accusations of misconduct and ensures the originality of their work [32].

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into academic writing, these disclosure requirements are expected to evolve. Some anticipate that disclosing AI use will eventually become a standard procedure in the submission process, similar to declarations of author contributions and conflicts of interest [4]. Meanwhile, the debate continues about whether attribution is necessary when AI is used simply as a tool to enhance writing and grammar rather than to generate entirely new content [17].

Academic journals generally require authors to disclose AI use in manuscript preparation, though specific policies vary in terms of where and how much detail to provide. Most journals mandate acknowledging the specific AI tools used, their versions, and which parts of the manuscript were affected, while distinguishing between substantial content generation and basic grammar checking.

4 Restrictions on AI-Generated Content

While most academic journals allow some form of AI assistance in manuscript preparation, there are significant differences in the specific restrictions they place on AI-generated content. The Science family of journals has adopted one of the most stringent approaches, explicitly prohibiting not only AI authorship but also the use of any AI-produced content, including text, images, figures, and graphics in papers [16] [22]. Science's editor-in-chief, H. Holden Thorp, expressed concern after a study revealed that experienced academic reviewers could only detect 63% of AI-generated abstracts, leading to the reinforcement of their editorial policy that considers AI-generated text as plagiarism rather than the product of an author's ideas [22].

In contrast, other major publishers like Elsevier and Springer Nature have adopted more permissive approaches. Elsevier's policy specifies that authors may use AI to improve readability and language without reservations, though they must disclose such use [31]. However, Elsevier prohibits authors from using AI tools to create or modify images unless such use is an integral part of the research design or methodology, which must be clearly explained in the manuscript [15]. Similarly, Springer Nature allows AI assistance with proper documentation, requiring researchers to disclose their use of AI tools in the methods or acknowledgments sections [22].

Among journals with specific guidelines, only about 1% explicitly prohibit using generative AI in manuscript preparation altogether [11]. This suggests that the complete prohibition of AI use is rare, with most journals focusing instead on disclosure requirements and limitations on specific uses. Some publishers, such as Elsevier, explicitly note that their policies apply only to the writing process, not the research process itself, with about 8% of publishers and 22% of journals making this distinction [11].

The rationale behind these restrictions largely centers on concerns about research integrity and the potential for plagiarism. The rise of generative AI has triggered ethical discussions regarding the implications of employing AI tools to aid in the creation of papers [1]. There are legitimate worries about AI hallucination potentially leading to the dissemination of false information, which has influenced some journals to restrict AI use in scientific writing [13]. Additionally, concerns about the boundaries between acceptable assistance and "too much help" remain unclear, particularly when authors feed their own text into AI systems and ask for rewrites [16].

Academic integrity concerns extend beyond manuscript writing to peer review processes as well. Some funding agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, forbid the use of large language models "for analyzing and formulating peer-review critiques" due to concerns regarding the breach of confidentiality

[13]. Similarly, journals like Science and the Journal of Clinical Oncology prohibit peer reviewers from using AI tools to produce review comments, as these may contain errors stemming from AI hallucination [13].

As AI technologies continue to evolve, there are increasing efforts to develop technological solutions to detect AI-generated texts, though these approaches are not foolproof and could potentially lead to false positives where human-generated text is wrongly flagged as AI-generated [7]. To maintain research integrity, researchers are advised to carefully scrutinize and revise any material generated by AI models, ensuring accuracy and clarity in communication, rather than relying solely on AI tools as the primary source for their academic work [9] [6].

> Academic journals have implemented varying levels of restrictions on AI-generated content, with some banning it entirely while others permit it with proper disclosure. These policies reflect concerns about research integrity, plagiarism, and the inability of AI to take responsibility for published work.

5 Variations in Editorial Policies

Despite the increasing standardization around prohibiting AI authorship, significant variations persist in how academic journals approach AI-generated content more broadly. Among leading publishers, these differences reflect distinct philosophical positions on the relationship between AI tools and scholarly integrity. The Science family of journals has adopted one of the most restrictive approaches, not only banning AI tools as authors but also prohibiting any AI-produced content including text, images, figures, and graphics in papers [30] [22]. This stance was reinforced after a study revealed that experienced academic reviewers could only detect 63% of AI-generated abstracts, leading Science to classify AI-generated text as plagiarism rather than original author content [22].

In contrast, other major publishers like Springer Nature have implemented more permissive policies, allowing AI use with proper documentation in the methods or acknowledgments sections [22]. Nature, for instance, requires researchers to clearly document their use of large language models in appropriate sections such as methods or acknowledgments [7]. These variations highlight fundamental disagreements about what constitutes original scholarly work in an era of AI assistance.

The prevalence of AI guidance also varies considerably across disciplines and journals. A study of 125 nursing studies journals found that 37.6% required explicit statements about generative AI use in their authors' guidelines, while only 14.5% of medicine, general and internal journals included similar information [28]. Among the top 100 largest publishers, only 24% had released any guidance on generative AI [11].

Even when journals do provide guidelines, there is considerable heterogeneity in their specific requirements. Among journals with disclosure policies, 75% of publishers and 43% of journals included specific disclosure criteria, but where to disclose AI use varied widely—including in methods, acknowledgments, cover letters, or dedicated sections [11]. Only 1% of journals explicitly prohibited the use of generative AI in manuscript preparation, while 8% of publishers and 22% of journals specified that their guidelines applied exclusively to the writing process rather than the research process itself [11].

The variation extends to peer review processes as well. Policies on whether reviewers can use AI tools range from completely restrictive to permissive with disclosure requirements [20]. These differences reflect ongoing debates about fundamental questions in academic publishing: Where is the boundary between acceptable AI assistance and "too much help"? Is it ethical to use AI to rewrite one's own text? Can AI-generated images be included in papers without constituting plagiarism? [16] [12].

As AI technologies evolve, academic publishers are developing varied approaches to detection and enforcement. Some institutions are implementing technological solutions to identify AI-generated text, though these methods are not foolproof and risk false positives where human-written text is incorrectly flagged as AI-generated [7]. Many universities are also revising their academic integrity policies to include generative AI within their definitions of plagiarism [7]. The substantial variations in current policies suggest that the academic community has yet to reach consensus on appropriate AI use in scholarly publishing, with further policy evolution expected as these technologies become more integrated into research workflows.

> Academic publishers vary widely in their approaches to AI-generated content, with some journals banning such content entirely while others permit its use with proper attribution. These disparities extend across different journals, disciplines, and specific uses of AI such as in manuscript preparation versus peer review.

6 Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity

The increasing prevalence of AI-generated content in academic publishing has triggered substantial ethical debates about research integrity. These concerns extend beyond merely technical considerations to fundamental questions about the authenticity of scholarly work. As AI tools become more sophisticated, there are "legitimate concerns and debates about the implications of employing AI tools to aid in the creation of papers based on valid research data" [1]. One primary concern involves the potential for AI to inadvertently facilitate plagiarism, as "AI systems generate text based on large data sets, and although they aim to produce original content, there is always the risk of unintentional plagiarism if the AI-generated text closely resembles existing works" [32] [25].

The difficulty in detecting AI-generated content poses additional challenges for maintaining academic integrity. Recent studies indicate that "experienced academic reviewers could only detect 63% of AI-generated abstracts," prompting journals like Science to classify AI-generated text as plagiarism rather than original author content [16] [30]. This detection challenge has led to a growing "need for software that can detect plagiarism and identify scientific papers that have been written by AI in order to maintain the integrity of academic research" [1].

The ethical implications extend beyond plagiarism to broader questions about responsible AI use in academic contexts. There remains significant ambiguity about appropriate boundaries: "When we feed ChatGPT with our own text and ask it to rewrite it, is that too much help to be considered ethical? Does the answer depend on the length of the text—and if so, how can we determine the proper boundary?" [16] [12]. Similarly contentious questions arise regarding AI-generated images and broader content ownership concerns, particularly "who has the right to claim copyright over AI-generated content (text, images, etc.): the prompt creator, the AI, the AI developer or the owners of the training data?" [16].

In response to these ethical challenges, educational institutions and publishers are updating their policies. Universities are "revisit and revis their plagiarism policies to encompass the ethical utilization of AI as a creative collaborator" while attempting to differentiate "between deliberate deception and legitimate AI-assisted writing" [19]. Many universities have begun "revising their academic integrity policies to include generative AI within their definitions of plagiarism" .

The potential for AI to disseminate false information presents additional ethical concerns. "Considering the possibility of plagiarism and dissemination of false information resulting from AI hallucination," some journals have implemented strict prohibitions on AI-generated content in scientific writing [13]. Concerns about confidentiality also extend to peer review processes, with organizations like the National Institutes of Health forbidding "the use of LLMs 'for analyzing and formulating peer-review critiques' due to concerns regarding the breach of confidentiality" [13].

To mitigate these ethical concerns, many stakeholders emphasize transparency and researcher accountability. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), and World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) "emphasize the importance of transparency in disclosing how AI tools were used in the study and manuscript preparation" [13]. This focus on transparency is increasingly reflected in journal policies, with many requiring "authors to make clear if the text, all or in part, was produced using generative language software" [21].

Ultimately, responsibility for the integrity of AI-assisted work remains with human researchers. It is "imperative for researchers to bear the responsibility of ensuring the authenticity and proper attribution of the content generated by AI models" [9]. To maintain integrity, researchers are advised to "diligently scrutinize and revise any material generated by AI models, ensuring accuracy and clarity in communication, or they should avoid relying solely on ChatGPT as a sole source for papers" [9] [6]. This emphasis on human accountability aligns with OpenAI's own policy, which states that humans ”must take ultimate responsibility for the content being published” [26].

The ethical challenges surrounding AI in academic publishing will likely evolve as these technologies become more sophisticated and integrated into research workflows. There remains an ongoing need for ”comprehensive discussions about authorship policies” [27] and for ”funders, publishers, and research institutions adopt clear policies to encourage openness and public understanding of the use of AI-generated content” [14].

The rise of generative AI in academic writing has raised significant ethical concerns about plagiarism, research integrity, and authorship attribution. Academic institutions are responding by revising plagiarism policies and implementing detection methods while emphasizing transparency and researcher accountability for AI-generated content.

7 Future Implications

The rapidly evolving landscape of AI in academic publishing suggests several significant implications for the future. As generative AI tools become more sophisticated and widespread, disclosure of AI use may evolve from a special requirement to a standard procedure. Some experts anticipate that ”disclosing the use of AI will likely resemble standard procedures for declaring author contributions, conflicts of interest, and other necessary disclosures during the submission process” [4]. This normalization reflects the growing recognition that AI applications in academic writing may eventually become commonplace or even essential components of many studies.

The current debate around AI-generated content in academic publishing appears to be in its nascent stages, with further policy evolution expected. As noted by some researchers, ”the debate surrounding the use of AI tools and its implications is still in its infancy, requiring an update and review of the situation in the near future” [22]. This suggests that current policies should be viewed as initial responses rather than settled approaches to a complex challenge.

Authorship conventions may undergo significant reconsideration as AI tools become more integrated into research workflows. The controversy surrounding past instances where researchers attempted to list AI tools as co-authors has ”sparked a debate about authorship conventions in the context of AI-generated content” with some experts arguing against AI authorship while ”others highlight their role in generating ideas and producing papers” [14]. These discussions may lead to fundamental changes in how authorship is conceptualized and credited.

The academic community also faces challenging questions about regulatory approaches to AI in scholarly writing. Some researchers have questioned the feasibility of restrictive policies, noting that ”if only exhortations were used to discourage the use of LLMs and other AI systems in academic writing, it seems doubtful that much would be achieved,” while more intrusive enforcement measures could potentially undermine academic freedom [10]. This tension becomes particularly acute if ”future AI systems do indeed come to exceed human capacities in more and more key aspects of analytic reasoning,” as prohibiting their use could potentially impede scientific progress [10].

Despite these variations and ongoing debates, there appears to be growing consensus that individual publishers will retain significant discretion in determining specific AI policies. As researchers have observed, ”the extent to which AI usage is allowed or barred is likely to remain at the discretion of individual publishers,” though ”one thing that seems clear is that each publisher needs to provide a clear policy on whether AI is allowed and, if so, in which aspects of manuscript preparation and review” [17] [18].

The future implications extend beyond merely technical considerations to fundamental questions about research integrity and transparency. There is an increasing call for academic publishers to ”engage in discussions about the implications of AI-generated content and create comprehensive guidelines for publishing such content” [14]. Additionally, ”funders, publishers, and research institutions should adopt clear policies to encourage openness and public understanding of the use of AI-generated content” to ensure that technological advancement does not come at the expense of research quality and integrity [14].

The future of AI in academic publishing will likely involve more standardized disclosure practices and ongoing debates about appropriate AI integration. As these technologies evolve, the academic community faces the challenge of balancing technological advancement with maintaining research integrity.

Acknowledgements

Generative AI has been used to prepare this manuscript.

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