ACL Policy on Publication Ethics

It is important for members of the ACL community, especially authors and reviewers, to understand ACL's position on publication ethics, which is described in this document.

ACL is a scientific and professional society for people working on computational problems involving human language. Since the ACL deals with reviewing and publishing research, it is important to be clear about what publication practices are considered ethical.

This policy draws upon multiple authoritative sources, including IEEE Policy, ACM Policy, ACL 2023 Policy, COLM 2024 Policy, the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE), USENIX, and others. References are given below.

The goal of this policy is to provide a fair publication process and to prevent harm, as defined by ACM/COPE. Subsections below provide definitions, outline the scope, define the policies, and provide references for other issues.

Aoife Cahill
Leon Derczynski
Kokil Jaidka
– Publication Ethics Committee co-chairs, June 2024

(Authors listed in order of surname, alphabetical)

1. Definitions

Reviewer

Reviewer refers to people writing peer reviews of manuscripts submitted for consideration to ACL venues.

Editor

Editor refers to people involved in making a decision about a submitted manuscript's rejection, acceptance, scheduling, or format, but not writing direct (i.e. non-meta) reviews. Editors include action editors, area chairs, senior area chairs, programme chairs, and similar roles.

Convener

A person who arranges meetings of groups or committees, for example conferences or workshops.

Author

Any person named in the “Authors” field of a submission.

Works

Author-created material submitted for review or created for presentation. This includes manuscripts as well as appendices, presentations, code, datasets, videos, images, etc.

Conflict of interest

The ACL definitions of a conflict of interest are given at: https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/ACL_Conference_Conflict-of-interest_policy

ACL Venues

ACL main conference; ACL Regional body main conferences; ACL SIG conferences; workshops at these conferences; TACL; CL.

Generative tools

Here we include text and image generation tools, commonly referred to as generative AI tools, trained on massive datasets to generate multimedia outputs. These can be privacy-preserving or non-privacy preserving. An example of a non-privacy preserving tool is a text or image generation tool, that stores input data for a commercial purpose, and is typically hosted on remote servers managed by third-party companies. An example of a privacy-preserving tool is a text and image generation tool that doesn’t store input data.

2. Scope

This policy applies to works submitted to, reviewed by, published at, and presented at ACL venues.

3. Policies

3.1. Conflicts of Interest

Authors, reviewers and editors must confidentially disclose all relevant affiliations and relationships that may constitute conflicts of interest at the time of submission. Review and publication must follow the ACL Conflict-of-Interest policy.

3.2. Authorship

Following existing ACL policies and the Vancouver Convention on Authorship, authorship of ACL papers must be based on the following 4 criteria:

a. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
b. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
c. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
d. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

All those designated as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, and all who meet the four criteria should be identified as authors. Those who meet some but not all of the four criteria should be acknowledged. These authorship criteria are intended to reserve authorship status for those who deserve credit and can take responsibility for the work. The criteria are not intended for use as a means to disqualify colleagues from authorship who otherwise meet authorship criteria by denying them the opportunity to meet criteria (b) or (c). Persons who have contributed to one point must be invited to participate in the others; for example, someone who comes up with or conducts experiments must be invited to draft/revise and approve the final document.

All authors are responsible for any article submitted to, reviewed at, published, or presented in ACL venues.

3.2.1. Guidelines for Generative Assistance in Authorship

Authors are responsible for all content submitted. Authors should familiarize themselves with the ACL policy on plagiarism detailed below, based on the COPE guidelines.

Generative AI tools and technologies may not be listed as authors of a submission, and any use of generative AI tools and technologies to create content should instead be fully disclosed in the Acknowledgements section - for instance, “Section 3 was written with inputs from ChatGPT.”

If and when required to use LLMs to support their research, authors are encouraged to use ethically-sourced and open models. Guidelines for appropriate use of generative assistance follow.

a. **Assistance purely with the language of the paper.** This covers models used for paraphrasing or polishing the author’s original content, rather than for suggesting new content---similar to tools like grammar checkers, spell checkers, dictionaries, and synonym tools. The use of tools that only assist with proofreading, like grammar or spell checkers, does not need to be disclosed.

b. **Short-form input assistance.** This covers predictive keyboards or tools that offer suggestions during typing, that might be powered by generative language models. The use of such tools does not need to be disclosed.
c. **Literature search.** This covers search assistants, e.g., to identify relevant literature. The usual requirements for citation accuracy and thoroughness of literature reviews apply.
d. **Low-novelty text.** This covers the automatic generation of text about pre-existing ideas. Authors should specify where such automatically generated text was used, and convince the reviewers that the generation was checked to be accurate and is accompanied by relevant and appropriate citations. If the generation copies text from existing work, the publication ethics policy applies to that text. Authors need (for example) to acknowledge all relevant citations: both the source of the text used and the source of the idea(s).
e. **New ideas.** This covers when generative model output reads to the authors as new research ideas that would deserve co-authorship or acknowledgment from a human colleague (e.g., topics to discuss, framing of the problem), which the authors then develop themselves. As with all new ideas, the authors should conduct a literature search to determine relevant prior work and cite to ensure proper credit. The authors should disclose if models were used in this manner.
f. **New ideas + new text:** ACL does not consider a generative model to be an entity that can fulfill the requirements of co-authorship.

3.2.2. Prior publication

These guidelines recognize that it is common in technical publishing for material to be presented at various stages of its evolution. As one example, this can take the form of publishing early ideas in a workshop, more developed work in a conference, and fully developed contributions as journal articles. This publication process is an important means of scientific communication. The editor of a publication may choose to re-publish existing material for a variety of reasons, including promoting wider distribution and serving readers by aggregating special material in a single publication. This practice continues to be recognized and accepted by the ACL. At the same time, the ACL requires that this evolutionary process be fully referenced by the author.

Authors submitting articles must disclose whether there are prior publications, e.g., conference articles, by the authors that are similar, whether published or submitted. They must also include information that very clearly states how the new submission differs from the previously published work(s). Such articles should be cited in the submitted article in a manner that maintains author anonymity.

Note the point below on text re-use, where there is a limit to how much material may be re-used across papers.

3.2.3. Consent of content holders

The ACL assumes that material submitted to its publications is properly available for general dissemination for the readership of those publications. It is the responsibility of the authors, not the ACL, to determine if disclosure of their material requires the prior consent of other parties. If prior consent is required, authors must obtain permission before article submission.

3.2.4. Plagiarism

ACL defines plagiarism as using someone else's prior ideas, processes, results, or words without explicitly acknowledging the original author and source. Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and considered a serious breach of professional conduct.

Plagiarism manifests itself in a variety of forms, including:

a. verbatim copying, near-verbatim copying (including translation), or intentionally paraphrasing substantive portions of prior or under-review work without proper attribution
b. using automated tools that rephrase existing work as one's own text without proper attribution to the original author(s)
c. self-plagiarism, or copying elements of another prior or under-review work, such as equations, tables, charts, illustrations, presentations, or photographs that are not common knowledge, or copying or intentionally paraphrasing sentences without proper or complete source citation, even if the works have a common author
d. verbatim copying of portions of another's work with incorrect source citation

Whether a prior article has been formally published is not a factor in determining plagiarism---work not formally published may still be plagiarized. This includes content provided online in preprints, tutorials, manuals, and essays, as well as offline content in any form. The representation of any other person's material as one's own work is plagiarism.

3.2.5. Text Re-use

An article submitted for publication to ACL should be original work submitted to a single ACL venue.

Recycling of material in a new document happens when the material in the new document is identical, or substantially equivalent in both form and content, to that of the source. At times, it may be necessary for authors to recycle portions of their own previously published work or to include another author's material.

When an author recycles text, charts, photographs, or other graphics from his/her own previously published material, the author shall:

a. Adhere to all copyright policies, clearly indicate all recycled material and provide a full reference to the original publication of the material (anonymised if necessary).

b. If the previously published or submitted material is used as a basis for a new submission, clearly indicate how the new submission differs from the previously published work(s).

Due to the volume of submissions received with duplicated content, the overlap threshold is now 10%. This means that there must be no more than a 10% (e.g., in terms of number of tokens) overlap between: (a) the text that a manuscript, at any point in the publication process, presents as original; (b) any other works submitted to ACL venues or published anywhere; and (c) concurrent submissions under review at ACL venues. Author's own pre-prints are excluded from this limitation. See also the ACL policy on double submission.

3.2.6. Electronic Posting

Authors submitting manuscripts for review should be aware of the ACL Anonymity Policy. The policy applies to authors who post part or all of a submitted manuscript on a Web site. The policy is found at https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/ACL_Anonymity_Policy.

3.2.7. Dual submission

Authors should follow the ACL double submission policy. Articles submitted for consideration should not have been published previously and should not be concurrently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Authors must disclose all prior publication(s) and current submissions when submitting an article. At the venue chairs' discretion, some forms of submission articles may be exempted from this rule.

3.2.8. Author Conduct

Authors should follow the ACL anti-harassment policy during the review and publication process. Attempts by authors to deanonymize reviewers, editors, or any works, or otherwise compromise the fairness of the review process are not permitted. Authors are expected to follow the ACL Anonymity Policy for Authors.

Violating the expected behavior standards of a venue, which requires that interactions be free from harassment, bullying, discrimination, and retaliation across all forms of presentation as outlined in the Scope, may be referred to the ACL Professional Conduct Committee.

3.3. Content of Submitted, Published, or Presented Material

This subsection applies to all ACL works and serves as guidelines for relevant decisions made by the person responsible for the publication, as well as the PEC for issues raised post-publication.

3.3.1. Content Guidelines

The discussion of technical matters will continue to be the primary function of forums provided by ACL. The following guidelines clarify the characteristics of allowable content in ACL works:

a. Technical, i.e. empirical and theoretical, articles accepted for inclusion in ACL publications shall comprise scientific content.
b. Any nontechnical content or material in an article accepted for publication is expected to be essential to the technical content of that article (for example, content that extends, supports, or provides relevant background). Author(s) shall state how the nontechnical content or material contributes to the article.
c. Acknowledgments of data consent and approval by stakeholders or subjects is allowed. Acknowledgments of contributors who are not authors of the article, such as in a footnote or an acknowledgments section, shall be limited to statements relative to funding sources, as well as technical or material contributions from individuals or organizations. Acknowledgments for technical or material contributions (such as developing instrumentation for collecting data) should briefly explain how such contributions are essential to the article's technical content.
d. If any political opinions are expressed which also follow this policy and this set of guidelines, an Acknowledgments section must clarify that these are the opinions of the author(s), and no endorsement by ACL, its officials, or its members is implied. For political opinions beyond these guidelines, see (b) above.
e. Submissions should follow the ACL formatting guidelines
f. Automatically generated text follows the policy given in the Authorship section above.
g. For content about broader impact, see below

Examples of unallowable content include changes to the content of the paper during review or after acceptance that deviate from the original scope of the paper or constitute unacceptable content; conjecture, unless relevant to the presented research supported by citations; illegal content; potentially harmful content, unless preceded by a warning and gap (see policy on harmful content); toxic content/inflammatory writing/hate speech unless it is a necessary scientific example (see policy on harmful content).

3.3.2. Societal impact

Technical developments can profoundly impact society. Social conditions also shape the course of technical developments. It is, therefore, often appropriate to include discussions of the social aspects related to the technical content in the author’s work. It is also possible that the discussion of pertinent interrelated social, economic and technical aspects leads to political conclusions on the author's part. Like other aspects of the paper’s content, discussions of social impact will be subject to peer review, and may be referred to the ACL PEC process.

Discussions of societal impact should adhere to the following guidelines.

a. **Relevance:** The subject matter should be relevant to the ACL fields of interest and their impact on society. If the relevance or appropriateness is not self-evident from the author's presentation, it should be made clear by adding a suitable introductory statement.
b. **Implications:** Implications, including political conclusions, where discussed, should be contextualized to their relevance to a specific research problem.
c. **Limitations:** Limitations and perspectives counter to the authors' conclusions must be made clear if they are not self-evident. Inferences from the findings, whether technical (e.g., LLM's beam search algorithms as a source of bias) or sociopolitical (e.g, race or culture as a source of differences in findings) should be appropriately hedged.

3.3.3. Harmful content

The term 'harmful' refers to the content that creates a risk of harm (e.g., hate speech as a cause of harm). In practice, whether a form of content presents a hazard depends on a range of intersecting factors, including the nature of the content; the immediate and broader context; the historical setting; where it comes from; who it is directed at; and who encounters it. Small differences in these factors can make a substantial difference, and not all content that presents a risk of harm will actually inflict harm in every case. We adopt the position that harmful content both constitutes a harm in-of-itself (i.e., it is harmful because of its intrinsic features) and causes harm because of the substantial risk of detrimental effects on individuals, groups or societies (Kirk et al. 2022).

Examples of harmful material include hate speech, misinformation, depictions of crime and violence, and accounts of trauma.

Harmful material may only be included in works if:

a. It is legal to do so in the ACL jurisdiction (USA)
b. It is relevant to the technical content of the submission
c. Doing so enhances the exposition of the content
d. Inclusion follows guidelines for handling and presenting harmful content (see Kirk et al., 2022)
e. It is preceded by a warning and consumers are provided sufficient opportunities to avoid the harmful content

3.4. Reviewing

Peer review assists editors in making publication decisions and, through the communications with the author, may also assist the author in improving the paper. Peer review is an essential component of formal scholarly communication. Reviewers are expected to follow the ACL Guidelines for Reviewers.

3.4.1. Reviewer Conduct

a. Reviewers and editors are responsible for maintaining the security and privacy of any paper and additional materials submitted as part of the review process.
b. Any reviewer or editor who identifies a conflict of interest should notify the venue chairs and decline to review the manuscript.
c. Any selected reviewer who feels unqualified to review the research reported in a manuscript or knows that its prompt review will be impossible should notify the editor and decline to participate in the review process.
d. Collusion, where the reviewer or editor might deliberately collude with authors or others to manipulate the review process unfairly, is forbidden.
e. Reviewers and editors must not attempt to manipulate citations, which includes asking authors to cite the reviewer's or editor's work (or that of their associates) unnecessarily
f. Reviewers and editors must never disclose or reveal any personal information about authors with the intention to target them (doxxing), which could undermine the anonymity and integrity of the review process.
g. Reviewers and editors must not participate in any form of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or retaliation towards authors or other participants in the review process.
h. Reviewers and editors must not use confidential information from a reviewed manuscript for personal advantage before the information is publicly available, including leveraging research ideas or data.
i. Secondary reviewers, if any, should first be officially added into the reviewing system before they are invited to provided a review, and they must similarly treat the manuscript as a confidential document.
j. Reviewers and editors must report observed discrepancies or signs of potential author, reviewer, or editor misconduct, such as plagiarism, data fabrication, data misuse, or duplicate submission to the designated channels.
k. Reviewers should follow the ACL anti-harassment policy during the review and publication process.

3.4.2. Guidelines for Generative Assistance in Peer Review

The reviewer has to read the paper fully and write the content and argument of the review by themselves, subject to the secondary reviewer policy described above, and it is not permitted to use generative assistance to create the first draft. This requirement extends to the meta-review, and the reviewer has to write any meaningful argumentation in the meta-review by themselves.

Generative assistance should be used responsibly. For instance, it is reasonable to use writing assistance to paraphrase the review, e.g. to help the reviewers who are not native speakers of English. It is also reasonable to use tools that help to check proofs.

Neither reviewers nor editors should upload a submitted manuscript or any part of it into a non-privacy preserving generative tool as this may violate the authors' confidentiality and intellectual property rights and, where the paper contains personally identifiable information, may breach data privacy rights.

This confidentiality requirement extends to the peer review report, as it may contain confidential information about the manuscript and/or the authors. For this reason, neither reviewers nor editors may upload their peer review report into a non-privacy preserving generative tool, even if it is just for the purpose of improving language and readability.

3.5. Convening

Reasonable efforts should be made by editors and, in conference and workshop settings, conveners, to provide discussion that includes differing viewpoints as adjudicated feasible. This must also be taken into consideration by the ACL venue program chairs.

4. Other Issues

Issues not covered by existing policy but going against policy goals can be referred to the PEC. The PEC may add policy and take measures regarding issues not covered by policy but going against policy goals. Referred cases may be sent onwards to the appropriate committee.

5. Handling of Articles from Authors in Embargoed Countries

As a US-based organization, policy on handling works from authors in embargoed countries follows the United States Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).
For more information on OFAC go to https://ofac.treasury.gov/.

6. References

ACL 2023 AI Policy: ACL 2023 Policy on AI Writing Assistance
https://2023.aclweb.org/blog/ACL-2023-policy/ ,
https://2023.aclweb.org/blog/review-acl23/#faq-can-i-use-ai-writing-assistants-to-write-my-review

ACL 2024: ACL Author guidelines.
https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/ACL_Author_Guidelines

ACL 2024: ACL Policies for Review and Citation
https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/ACL_Policies_for_Review_and_Citation

ACL Double submission policy.
https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/Double_Submission_Policy_for_Conferences

ACM 2023: ACM policy on Authorship.
https://www.acm.org/publications/policies/new-acm-policy-on-authorship

ACM 2023: ACM Policy on Plagiarism, Misrepresentation, and Falsification
https://www.acm.org/publications/policies/plagiarism-overview

Authorship Changes Policy for ACL Conference Papers
https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/Authorship_Changes_Policy_for_ACL_Conference_Papers

COPE: Committee on Publishing Ethics, https://publicationethics.org/

Elsevier: Duties of reviewers
https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/publishing-ethics#3-duties-of-reviewers

Enforcement of the ACL Anti-Harassment policy - Implementation
https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/images/1/1f/Enforcement_of_the_ACL_Anti-Harassment_Policy_-_Implementation.pdf

Journal of Brand Management: Editorial guidelines and expectations of authors
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41262-020-00217-3

IEEE 2024: Submission and Peer Review Policies,
https://journals.ieeeauthorcenter.ieee.org/become-an-ieee-journal-author/publishing-ethics/guidelines-and-policies/submission-and-peer-review-policies/

IEEE Manual: IEEE Publication Services and Products Board Operations Manual 2024,
https://pspb.ieee.org/images/files/PSPB/opsmanual.pdf

COLM 2024: COLM Code of Conduct https://colmweb.org/CoC.html

Kirk, H. R., Birhane, A., Vidgen, B., & Derczynski, L. (2022). Handling and Presenting Harmful Text in NLP Research. In *Findings of EMNLP*. Association for Computational Linguistics.

USENIX: Instructions for presenters
https://www.usenix.org/conference/usenixsecurity23/instructions-presenters