Text Recycling Research Project

TRRP GUIDE TO DEVELOPING TEXT RECYCLING POLICIES

Introduction

The TRRP Policy for Text Recycling is a model policy for reuse of prose in academic/research publishing. This should suit many publishers who need a brief yet complete text recycling policy. We encourage adoption of these policies where possible since consistent expectations across publishers are beneficial for both authors and editors. However, the TRRP recognizes that some details of our recommended policy will not be appropriate for all publishers—whether because those details do not align with their publishing context or disciplinary norms, or because our format does not integrate well with their existing policy structure.

This guide is for publishers and editors who wish to modify the TRRP Policy or develop their own. It identifies the components that a comprehensive text recycling policy for authors should address and suggests questions for publishers to consider when developing their own policy.

Like the TRRP Policy, this guidance reflects the research findings of the TRRP. Our research shows that within the context of scholarly research, text recycling is often legal, ethical, and useful in promoting clear communication. Those developing their own policies will benefit from reviewing these other TRRP resources:

- TRRP Best Practices for Researchers
- Understanding Text Recycling in Research Writing: A Guide for Editors
- Text Recycling in Research Writing: U.S. Copyright Law and Fair Use

Once you have developed text recycling policies suitable for your publication, we recommend that you make them easy to locate by (1) labeling them as your "Text Recycling Policies" and (2) including the policy or a link to them in your author submissions guidelines.

Key Components a Text Recycling Policy Should Address

DEFINITION: Provide a definition of text recycling.

The term "text recycling" needs to be clearly defined for authors. We recommend the version we use in the TRRP Policy: "Text recycling is the reuse of textual material when the source (old) and destination (new) documents share at least one author, and the recycled text does not appear as a direct quote."

While the term "self-plagiarism" has often been used in the past to name this practice, we encourage publishers to avoid that term and use "text recycling" instead.

Because text recycling always involves taking material from one place and reusing it in another, policies should also specify terms that distinguish between the source document where the recycled language originated and the new document into which that language is recycled. We prefer the terms "source" and "destination" for that purpose, but these terms may not be immediately understood by those new to this topic.

Question to consider:

What term(s) might researchers in our field be familiar with that need to be distinguished from text recycling (e.g., salami slicing, duplicate publication, redundant publication)?

AUTHORSHIP: Explain how authors should handle permissions in situations in which the authorship of a source and destination document overlap but are not identical.

In many fields, research groups often publish a series of interrelated papers with overlapping but not identical authors. In those cases, a policy should advise authors about what kinds of permission are needed from the authors of the source document who are not also authors of the destination document.

The TRRP Policy takes a pragmatic approach to this situation. It requires that the corresponding author of the destination document obtain permission from the corresponding author of the source document; it encourages but does not require the latter author to get permission from authors of the source document, as appropriate. Because authorship practices vary greatly by discipline, this approach could be adjusted in ways that make the best sense for a particular context.

Questions to consider:

> *What permissions are realistic to expect given the number of authors typically involved in our publications?*

> *Do disputes among previous co-authors involving text recycling seem likely to emerge in our context, and how could we best prevent them?*

> *Under what conditions (if any) should we ask researchers to provide written documentation of permission to recycle text from authors not involved in the destination text?*

TRANSPARENCY: Provide guidance for how authors should disclose text recycling.

Transparency is fundamental to ethical text recycling. Policies should guide authors on communicating with editors about the presence of text recycling in a manuscript, for example, by advising authors to identify recycled passages using a cover letter or particular field in a submission form. A stricter policy might ask authors to mark recycled text through highlighting as it appears in the manuscript.

Publishers should also consider how and when readers will be made aware that a published text contains recycled text. Current academic writing practices do not offer simple solutions for how recycled text can be made visible to readers; citation will usually be part of such a demarcation, but citation alone does not signify text recycling to most readers. If authors are expected to compose footnotes or other statements of text recycling for readers, these should be explained in the policy.

Questions to consider:

> *Do we want authors to be transparent about all or only certain types of recycled text (e.g., work in progress; previously published work for a similar audience and purpose; previously published work for a different audience or purpose)?*

> *How detailed do we expect authors to be in communications with editors? How will we balance our desire to have full information with the fact that extensive documentation may not be practical?*

> *Given the format and style of our publication, what are the most meaningful and clear ways we can let readers know that a published article contains recycled text? Do we expect authors to include these statements in their initial submissions, or are they added after manuscript acceptance, with guidance from the editors?*

DEVELOPMENTAL RECYCLING: Provide guidance for recycling from work in progress.

Source documents for text recycling can vary widely, not merely in terms of their publication status but also in terms of their purpose, audience, genre, and form. Our research shows that very few authors or editors object to recycling text that comes from work-in-progress documents, where the work is either uncirculated (e.g., grant proposals) or the text is shared only in an academic presentation (e.g., poster sessions or

conference slides) rather than as a formal publication. The TRRP Policy refers to this as "developmental recycling" and encourages publishers to endorse this practice whenever possible.

There may be cases where the distinction between "a presentation of work in progress" and "a publication" is unclear—such as when authors recycle slides from a conference talk which have been made available online. Publishers who feel that such ambiguity may be problematic should address it as fits their context. (Note that preprints, conference proceedings, and dissertations/theses are addressed separately below.)

Questions to consider:

> *What types of work-in-progress documents are authors likely to recycle from in submissions? Do any of these present potential problems for our journal?*

> *How explicit do we need to be in identifying acceptable sources for developmental text recycling?*

GENERATIVE RECYCLING: Provide guidance for recycling from previously published works in cases when the new work makes a substantive and original intellectual contribution.

Our research shows that most editors are fine with a limited amount of text recycling from previously published source documents in a new work that is distinctly different in its aims. We call this "generative recycling." Editors' views on generative recycling depend on the context and rhetorical purpose of the recycled text. They tend to be least concerned about recycling in sections that provide background information or methodological details of a research article. Some editors may, in fact, prefer that authors recycle descriptions of methods when consistency of language across articles is important for accurate communication. They also tend to be more accepting of generative recycling in the Introductions and Literature Reviews than in Results and Discussion sections (which are generally expected to contain new, original content).

Our recommended policy for generative recycling attends to these rhetorical differences and affirms the value of descriptive consistency in a series of articles that employ similar equipment, processes, and methodologies. Publishers may wish to set some specific limits on the amount of recycled text allowed, even in Methods sections, but we would caution publishers to think carefully about how to reasonably set, explain, and enforce such limits. Explicit quantitative limits (such as "no more than 500 words" or "no more than 50% of the text") are sometimes difficult to interpret in context and may result in more confusion rather than clarity.

Questions to consider:

> *What limits do we want to set on generative recycling? Do we want different limits for different parts of a research report? How can we communicate and explain those limits clearly in our policy? Do we want specific transparency guidelines for authors when they submit a manuscript that includes generative recycling?*

ADAPTIVE PUBLICATION: Journals that allow submissions that repurpose a previous publication with the same core content for a new readership or context (such as translations or adapting a research article for a non-expert audience) should develop text recycling policies that match the type(s) of adaptive publication they allow.

Most scholarly journals publish new, original works exclusively. Adaptive recycling policies for such journals need merely state that the journal does not accept or publish submissions of that type.

In some cases, however, journals might want to consider adaptive publications. For example, multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary journals might invite scholars to adapt or repurpose a published research study for a diverse disciplinary audience; STEM journals might be interested in republishing some translated articles, particularly in response to current concerns about inclusion and language diversity in STEM. If your

journal is open to any type of adaptive publication, you should provide authors with specific guidelines for submission, obtaining permissions, and attribution for these manuscripts.

Questions to consider:

> *Do we publish repurposed and/or translated publications? If so, do we have an existing policy that we can reference in our text recycling policy?*

> *Is our policy clear in directing authors to obtain permission from the copyright holder?*

> *How do we want to inform readers that this work has been previously published (in part or in full)?*

DUPLICATE PUBLICATION: Include an explicit statement that duplicate publication is not allowed.

Authors consulting your policies should see that duplicate publication will not be allowed and refer them to any additional policies on this matter.

Question to consider:

> *Does our journal currently have a policy on duplicate publication?*

DISSERTATIONS/THESES: Explain appropriate uses of dissertations and theses as sources for recycling.

Academic researchers often publish portions of their theses and dissertations as journal articles or book chapters. In some fields, it is common practice to turn a prior publication into part of a dissertation, while in others, it is common practice to recycle text from dissertations into publications. Thus, dissertations are commonly both sources and destinations for text recycling.

Text recycling policies should let researchers know what limitations, if any, a publisher imposes on recycling from dissertations. In some contexts, a dissertation is viewed as a work in progress from which recycling is freely allowed, while in others, it may be seen as a type of publication itself from which recycling may be subject to restrictions. We encourage publishers to set generous and explicit policies for recycling to and from dissertations and theses.

Questions to consider:

> *Do authors commonly submit work to our publication that is drawn directly from dissertations or theses? If so, do we want to place any restrictions on authors' recycling of materials from their dissertations and theses?*

PREPRINTS: If relevant, clarify whether and how your journal's policy on preprints might relate to the text recycling policy.

Preprints serve varied purposes across disciplines; they are virtually unused in some fields and common in others. Most publishers in fields where preprints are used have an existing preprint policy. It is helpful for text recycling policies to point authors to existing preprint policies, so that authors can understand whether reusing textual materials and ideas from a preprint in a submission is acceptable or not.

Question to consider:

> *If we have a preprint policy, would it benefit from revisions that explicitly address the issue of text recycling?*

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS: If relevant, clarify how your journal's policy on publishing conference papers or proceedings as research articles relates to your text recycling policy.

As we note in [Understanding Text Recycling: A Guide for Editors](#), some disciplines, such as computer science, consider papers published in conference proceedings to be the final versions of scholarly work and equivalent in status to publication in a journal. Other disciplines may view proceedings as early versions of works in progress, not as prior publications. How such papers and proceedings are perceived by a journal should be reflected in its policies.

Questions to consider:

What should our journal's text recycling policy be regarding conference papers and conference proceedings? Should these be considered publications or works in progress? Do we want to make a distinction between papers presented at conferences and those that appear in proceedings?

Additional Components to Consider

Consider whether different genres need customized text recycling policies.

The TRRP Policy is written to apply primarily to the production of new research articles. Publishers may find that some genres within a particular journal (such as book reviews, commentaries, symposia, review articles, abstract compilations, etc.) require additional specific guidance or policies that differ from research articles.

Make clear that encouraging or allowing text recycling in some contexts is not the same as encouraging duplicate publication or plagiarism.

Some authors who are unfamiliar with the idea of text recycling may misinterpret it as an invitation to engage in duplicate publication or plagiarism. Policies should take care to be clear about the nature and purposes of text recycling allowed by the publication and to distinguish them clearly from duplicate publication or plagiarism. Those wishing to keep policies brief can refer authors to the [educational materials the TRRP has developed for researchers](#), which offer robust explanations of text recycling.

Address the legal concerns about text recycling.

Whether text recycling of published material is legal depends on copyright laws in the jurisdiction where the republication would occur and any restrictions in the publishing contract the author signed for the source document. That said, there is little risk of legal action when authors follow the TRRP Policy, as no legal action has been brought against publishers to date for text recycling within these limits, in spite of the practice being widespread in the research world for decades. Nevertheless, if there is concern that the recycled material might infringe copyright, authors can be asked to obtain permission from the copyright holder.

If your text recycling policy allows more extensive recycling than the TRRP Policy, consult with legal counsel for guidance. (Those in the United States may wish to consult our [TRRP White Paper on U.S. Copyright Law](#).)

For unpublished source material, legal concerns only arise if the document was produced under a work-for-hire agreement. If so, authors should be instructed to obtain permission from that employer.