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Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Self-Plagiarism: How to Avoid Recycling Fraud

Robert P. Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH^{1,2}, Marcus A. Banks, MLIS³, and Jeffrey I. Ellis, MD⁴

1 Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Denver, CO

2 Department of Dermatology, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, Denver, CO

3 New York University School of Medicine, Ehrman Medical Library, New York, NY

4 Department of Dermatology, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY

1. What is self-plagiarism?

Self-plagiarism, also known as recycling fraud, occurs when an author reuses text in subsequent writings without attributing the previous publication.^{1–3}

2. Is self-plagiarism ever acceptable?

Thomas Jefferson repeated prose from previous writings in The Declaration of Independence and did not cite these works.⁴ Few would argue this famous example of self-plagiarism as unacceptable.

Most also agree that experts providing opinions to popular newspapers or magazines need not cite specific previous writings.

3. What is copyright?

The US Constitution grants Congress the power to “promote the progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” Copyright is this legal protection of a particular expression of an idea, but not of the facts or ideas themselves.⁵ In the US, copyright protection extends for the life of the author plus 70 years.⁶

4. How does self-plagiarism involve copyright infringement?

Authors of technical articles are often asked to assign copyright to a journal’s owner or publisher as a condition for publication—such is the case for the JAAD, whose owner is the AAD. In many cases the publisher handles permission requests from authors. Elsevier does

Corresponding Author: Robert Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH, Department of Dermatology, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, P.O. Box 6510, Mail Stop F703, Aurora, CO 80045-0510, TEL 303-399-8020 x2479, FAX 303-315-8272, E-mail: E-mail: robert.dellavalle@uchsc.edu.

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5. Have authors been legally sanctioned for violating copyright on their own words?

Few sanctions have been handed down as the courts have generally recognized that “authors have special rights to their words not withstanding copyright.”³

6. If copyright law has not been enforced against authors repeating themselves, then why worry about self-plagiarism?

Self-plagiarism is not acceptable in academic writing because academic writing is grounded by its references, and authors are expected to cite their closely related previous writing.

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none

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