

AFRICAN JOURNAL OF RHETORIC

Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement

Published by the African Association for Rhetoric (AAR) · ISSN 1998-2054

The *African Journal of Rhetoric* (AJR) is the peer-reviewed scholarly journal of the **African Association for Rhetoric** (AAR), devoted to the study of rhetoric, argumentation, discourse and public culture in Africa and beyond. AJR is committed to upholding the highest standards of publication ethics and to taking all reasonable steps against publication malpractice. This statement sets out the ethical obligations of all parties involved in the act of publishing in the journal: the editors and the editorial board, the peer reviewers, the authors, and the publisher.

This statement is modelled on the Core Practices and the *Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing* (4th edition, 2022) of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and it is aligned with the *Code of Best Practice in Scholarly Journal Publishing, Editing and Peer Review* of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), with which AJR complies in the context of its South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) accreditation. Where the present statement is silent on a specific matter, the COPE Core Practices and the ASSAf Code are to be read as the journal's governing reference points.

1. ETHICAL MISSION STATEMENT

AJR exists to advance rigorous, original and ethically sound scholarship in African rhetoric and related fields, and to make that scholarship visible to an international readership. The journal is committed to fairness, intellectual integrity, editorial independence, and the equitable treatment of authors and reviewers regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional affiliation, seniority, disability, religious or political belief, or geographic location. Editorial decisions are made solely on the scholarly merit, originality, clarity and relevance of the work, and on its fit with the journal's scope, and never on the identity or standing of the author.

AJR is committed to preserving the integrity of the scholarly record. It regards the detection and prevention of publication malpractice — including plagiarism, data fabrication or falsification, redundant or duplicate publication, undisclosed conflicts of interest, and improper authorship — as a shared responsibility of editors, reviewers and authors, and it undertakes to act on credible allegations of misconduct in a fair, timely and transparent manner.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EDITORS AND EDITORIAL BOARD

2.1 Decision-making and editorial independence

The Editor-in-Chief has full responsibility and authority for deciding which submitted manuscripts are accepted for publication, and exercises this authority independently of the publisher and of any commercial or political consideration. Decisions are guided by the editorial board, by the reports of independent peer reviewers, and by the journal's scholarly standards, scope and legal obligations (including those relating to defamation, copyright infringement and plagiarism).

2.2 Fair and unbiased review

The editors evaluate manuscripts on their intellectual content without regard to the author's race, gender, sexual orientation, religious or political belief, ethnic origin, citizenship, disability, or institutional affiliation. The editorial process is managed so that all parties are treated even-handedly, and each manuscript is assessed against a consistent, documented editorial standard.

2.3 Confidentiality

The editors and editorial staff do not disclose any information about a submitted manuscript to anyone other than the corresponding author, the reviewers and potential reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publisher, as appropriate. Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript are not used by any member of the editorial team in their own research without the express written consent of the author.

2.4 Conflicts of interest and editorial recusal

Editors and board members recuse themselves from handling manuscripts in which they have a conflict of interest arising from competitive, collaborative, financial, or personal relationships with any of the authors, institutions or funding bodies connected to the work. Where a member of the editorial leadership is named in, associated with, or otherwise connected to a submission — including invited contributions and keynote addresses — the handling of that submission and the final decision are documented as the responsibility of an editor without the conflict, and this handling is recorded transparently for the journal's file.

2.5 Integrity, corrections and vigilance

The editors take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of work in which research or publication misconduct has occurred. AJR operates a structured, multi-stage editorial and copy-editing process in which every accepted manuscript is assessed against the journal's standards and its referencing and source-attribution are checked. Where a discrepancy cannot be resolved without the author's input — for example, an incomplete or mismatched reference, an unattributed quotation, or a possible misattribution — it is flagged to the author for correction rather than silently altered, so that responsibility for the scholarly record remains with the author and the correction is made accurately.

When genuine errors in published work are identified, the journal publishes a correction or, where the error is of a kind that invalidates the work, a retraction, in accordance with COPE guidance. Allegations of misconduct concerning published articles are investigated even when they are raised years after publication.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REVIEWERS

3.1 Contribution to editorial decisions

Peer review assists the editors in making editorial decisions and, through the editorial communication with the author, may also assist the author in improving the manuscript. Peer review is an essential component of formal scholarly communication and lies at the heart of AJR's practice.

3.2 Peer review process

AJR practises **double-anonymised peer review**: the identities of the authors and of the reviewers are withheld from one another throughout the review process. Each manuscript accepted for review is evaluated by **at least two independent reviewers** with appropriate expertise, who are not affiliated with the author's institution and who have no conflict of interest in relation to the work. Reviewers provide reasoned, evidence-based assessments and a clear recommendation; where reviewers disagree substantively, the editors may seek one or more additional opinions before reaching a decision. The journal's website publicly describes this peer review process.

3.3 Promptness and competence

Any reviewer who feels unqualified to review the research reported in a manuscript, or who knows that its prompt review will be impossible, notifies the editors and excuses themselves from the review process so that alternative reviewers can be approached.

3.4 Confidentiality

Manuscripts received for review are treated as confidential documents. They are not shown to, or discussed with, others except as authorised by the editors. Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review are kept confidential and are not used for personal advantage.

3.5 Standards of objectivity and acknowledgement of sources

Reviews are conducted objectively. Personal criticism of the author is inappropriate. Reviewers express their views clearly with supporting arguments. Reviewers identify relevant published work that has not been cited by the authors, and draw to the editors' attention any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other published work of which they have personal knowledge, as well as any concern regarding the ethical conduct of the research.

3.6 Conflicts of interest

Reviewers do not consider manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or institutions connected to the papers, and they disclose any such conflict to the editors.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AUTHORS

4.1 Reporting standards and originality

Authors report their work accurately, and present an objective discussion of its significance. Underlying data are represented accurately. A manuscript contains sufficient detail and reference to permit others to engage with, and where applicable replicate, the work. Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behaviour and are unacceptable. Authors warrant that the submitted work is entirely original, and that where the work or words of others have been used, this has been appropriately cited or quoted and, where required, permission has been obtained.

4.2 Plagiarism and originality screening

Plagiarism in all its forms — from presenting another's work as the author's own, to copying or paraphrasing substantial parts of another's work without attribution, to claiming results from research

conducted by others — constitutes unethical publishing behaviour and is unacceptable. As part of its commitment to originality, AJR's policy is to screen submitted manuscripts for textual similarity using recognised similarity-detection software (*Turnitin*), and to consider the results alongside editorial judgement in identifying plagiarism, redundant publication and inadequate attribution.

4.3 Multiple, redundant or concurrent publication

Authors do not, in general, publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one journal. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently constitutes unethical publishing behaviour and is unacceptable. Where an article draws substantially on the author's previously published work, this is disclosed and cited. Previously delivered addresses (such as invited keynotes or conference addresses) prepared for publication in AJR are clearly identified as such.

4.4 Acknowledgement of sources

The work of others is always properly acknowledged. Authors cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Information obtained privately is not used or reported without explicit written permission from the source.

4.5 Authorship of the manuscript

Authorship is limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the reported study. All those who have made significant contributions are listed as co-authors. The corresponding author ensures that all appropriate co-authors, and no inappropriate co-authors, are included in the manuscript, and that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to its submission for publication.

4.6 Disclosure of conflicts of interest and funding

All authors disclose in their manuscript any financial or other substantive conflict of interest that might be construed to influence the results or interpretation of the manuscript. All sources of financial support for the work are disclosed.

4.7 Use of artificial intelligence and generative tools

Consistent with the ASSAf Code and prevailing best practice, authors disclose any use of artificial-intelligence or generative language tools in the conception, research, drafting or preparation of a submission, and describe the nature and extent of that use. Such tools are not credited as authors, since they cannot take responsibility for the work; authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the entire submission, including any content produced with the assistance of such tools.

4.8 Fundamental errors in published works

When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in their own published work, it is the author's obligation to promptly notify the journal's editors and to cooperate with them to retract or correct the paper.

5. RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Where a submission reports research involving human participants, authors ensure that the work was conducted in accordance with recognised ethical standards and with the approval of the relevant institutional or national research-ethics body, and they state this in the manuscript together with the approval reference where applicable. Authors ensure that the privacy and dignity of participants are respected, that informed consent was obtained, and that individuals are not identifiable from the published material unless they have given explicit consent. AJR's handling of personal information is consistent with applicable data-protection law, including, in the South African context, the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

6. PUBLISHING ETHICS AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLISHER

The **African Association for Rhetoric**, as publisher of AJR, is committed to ensuring that editorial decisions remain independent of advertising, reprint or other commercial revenue, and to supporting the editors in maintaining the integrity of the scholarly record. The journal is hosted and distributed through *SABINET* as its content platform. AJR is a subscription-access journal and does not levy article-processing or submission charges as a condition of consideration or acceptance. A modest page fee toward production and distribution costs may apply to accepted articles; where it does, it is payable only after a manuscript has been approved for publication, is never a condition of acceptance, and plays no part whatsoever in the editorial or peer-review decision. The ability to publish in AJR is in no way contingent on an author's ability to pay.

The publisher and editors take all appropriate measures to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, and in no case encourage such misconduct or knowingly allow it to take place. In the event of alleged or proven scientific misconduct, fraudulent publication, or plagiarism, the publisher, in close collaboration with the editors, takes all appropriate measures to clarify the situation and to amend the article in question. This includes the prompt publication of an erratum, clarification, or, in the most serious cases, a retraction or the removal of the affected work, in accordance with COPE guidance.

7. COMPLAINTS, APPEALS AND ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

AJR takes seriously all complaints and appeals concerning the conduct of its editorial and peer-review processes and all allegations of research or publication misconduct, whether raised before or after publication. In the first instance, complaints, appeals and allegations are directed in writing to the Editor-in-Chief, who determines and communicates the appropriate mechanism for redress. Where an allegation concerns the Editor-in-Chief, or where a conflict of interest would otherwise arise, the matter is referred to the Steering Committee of the African Association for Rhetoric for independent handling.

The journal investigates allegations proportionately, affords the parties concerned a fair opportunity to respond, and, where misconduct is established, applies remedies proportionate to the seriousness of the matter — which may include correction, retraction, notification of the author's institution, and a bar on future submissions. Where an allegation properly falls to be investigated by an author's

institution or employer, AJR refers the matter to that body and cooperates with its inquiry, consistent with COPE's guidance that the journal need not itself conduct such investigations.

8. CORRECTIONS, RETRACTIONS AND THE VERSION OF RECORD

AJR is committed to maintaining a reliable version of record. Corrections are published when necessary to correct significant errors that do not invalidate the work. Retractions are published where the findings are unreliable as a result of misconduct or honest error, where the work has been published elsewhere without appropriate disclosure or permission, where it constitutes plagiarism, or where it reports unethical research. Corrections and retractions are linked to the original article, clearly identified as such, and made freely available to readers, so that the integrity of the scholarly record and the trust of the research community are preserved.

This statement is publicly available on the journal's website and applies to all content published by AJR. It is reviewed periodically by the Editor-in-Chief and the editorial board and updated to reflect evolving best practice, including the current editions of the COPE Core Practices and the ASSAf Code of Best Practice.

Editorial contact: The Editor-in-Chief, African Journal of Rhetoric — sige@af rhet.org; aar.southafrica@gmail.com

Governing references: COPE Core Practices and Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (v4, 2022); ASSAf Code of Best Practice in Scholarly Journal Publishing, Editing and Peer Review.