



## Development of an Online Tool to Help Authors Provide Full Ethics Statements to Support Their Journal Submissions

By Alice Ellingham (Director, Editorial Office Ltd; [alice.ellingham@editorialoffice.co.uk](mailto:alice.ellingham@editorialoffice.co.uk); 0000-0002-5439-7993), Tracy Ronan (Editorial Assistant, Editorial Office Ltd), Rosie Walker, and Andrew Walker (Director, TaskAdept Ltd; [andrew.walker@taskadept.com](mailto:andrew.walker@taskadept.com))

### Introduction

The level of publication ethics or “responsible reporting of research” needed in submissions to peer-reviewed STM journals is currently a hot topic. Authors are now required to include a large amount of information in their submission, from author contributions, conflict of interest, and financial disclosure/funding, through to animal and/or human research ethics statements, to name just a few. Instructions for what to include is scattered throughout individual journals’ instructions to authors and independent guidelines<sup>1</sup> but there is as yet no standard for these disclosures. As well as the increased drive for information in STM publishing, there is a rise in non-native English speaking authors,<sup>2</sup> for whom guidelines that are scattered and incomplete become a greater barrier to publication.

As a peer-review management vendor, Editorial Office Ltd sees many non-native English speakers struggle with submission requirements, especially with the complex language of human and animal research ethics statements. Instructions for authors from several journals indicate that while they all require the same information, the instructions are varied and the format of statement rarely stated (Table 1). Field studies requirements are even less defined even though these are becoming more widely required.

### Development of “EthicsGen” Statement Generator

In order to assist authors, we have worked with a publishing software provider to develop a free online tool to help build a full and acceptable statement to support STM manuscript submissions. EthicsGen is a Web-based application that builds fully worded ethics statements by posing a series of questions. As the required data is input by the user, the generator builds a statement which provides all of the information required by current publications ethics standards. The tool is designed not to influence the author in their choice of statements, merely to allow them to format it correctly.

The tool currently covers ethics statements concerning animal research, human subjects research, and field studies.

#### *Animal Research Ethics*

In order to build a complete animal research ethics statement, the following elements are considered (Figure 1):

- inclusion of vertebrates or cephalopods;
- receipt of approval from institutional ethics committee;

- 1 Wager E, Kleinert S. Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. In: Mayer T, Steneck N, eds. *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment*. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore; 2011:309-316.
- 2 No authors listed. Non-native English-speaking authors and editors evaluate difficulties and challenges in publishing in international journals. *SciELO in Perspective*. <http://blog.scielo.org/en/2014/05/19/non-native-english-speaking-authors-and-editors-evaluate-difficulties-and-challenges-in-publishing-in-international-journals/>. Accessed March 9, 2016.

Table 1: Examples of research ethics requirements (on March 08, 2016).

Entity	Research Ethics Requirement
<i>PLOS ONE</i>	<p><b>Animal research:</b> “All research involving vertebrates or cephalopods must have approval from the authors’ Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) or equivalent ethics committee(s), and must have been conducted according to applicable national and international guidelines.”</p> <p><b>Human subjects research:</b> “All research involving human participants must have been approved by the authors’ Institutional Review Board (IRB) or by equivalent ethics committee(s), and must have been conducted according to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Helsinki.”</p> <p><b>Field studies:</b> “Methods sections for submissions reporting on any type of field study must include ethics statements that specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permits and approvals obtained for the work, including the full name of the authority that approved the study; if none were required, authors should explain why</li> <li>• Whether the land accessed is privately owned or protected</li> <li>• Whether any protected species were sampled</li> <li>• Full details of animal husbandry, experimentation, and care/welfare, where relevant”</li> </ul> <p>(The author guidelines provide formatted examples.)</p>
<i>Scientific Reports</i>	<p><b>Animal research:</b> “For articles in <i>Scientific Reports</i> reporting experiments on live vertebrates and/or higher invertebrates, the corresponding author must confirm that all experiments were performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. The manuscript must include a statement identifying the institutional and/or licensing committee approving the experiments, including any relevant details, in the methods section.”</p> <p><b>Human subjects research:</b> “For experiments involving human subjects, authors must identify the committee approving the experiments, and include with their submission a statement confirming that informed consent was obtained from all subjects.”</p>
<i>JAMA</i>	<p><b>Animal/human subjects research:</b> “For all manuscripts reporting data from studies involving human participants or animals, formal review and approval, or formal review and waiver, by an appropriate institutional review board or ethics committee is required and should be described in the Methods section. For those investigators who do not have formal ethics review committees, the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki should be followed. For investigations of humans, state in the Methods section the manner in which informed consent was obtained from the study participants (ie, oral or written) and whether participants received a stipend.”</p>
The Geological Society: Geologists’ Association Geological Fieldwork Code	<p><b>Field studies:</b> “5.1 Samples used for data or illustrations in articles submitted to the Geological Society of London must have been collected in a responsible manner in compliance with the Geologists’ Association Geological Fieldwork Code or, where appropriate, with their Code of Conduct for Rock Coring</p> <p>5.2 Data from samples that have been collected without permission from protected sites are not acceptable and should not be used in any paper submitted to the Geological Society of London. Where material from protected sites is used, authors must provide evidence that permission to collect samples was obtained.”</p>

**Ethics Statement Generator**  
Generate fully worded ethics statements to support journal submit

**Animal**

Did your study include vertebrate and/or Cephalopods (octopus, squid or cuttlefish)?  Yes  No

Did you receive approval from your institution's ethics committee, review board or IACUC?  Yes  No

Enter the full name of the ethics committee, review board or IACUC:  
University of Hampshire Ethics Committee

Do you want to provide an ethics approval number?  Yes  No

Enter the ethics approval number:  
2016-9876

Did you want to provide an animal care and welfare statement?  Yes  No

Enter the animal care and welfare statement:  
Rats were housed in colony cages in an automatically temperature controlled room and kept under a 12:12h light:dark cycle with white lighting. Water and feed were available ad libitum.

**Generated Ethics Statement:**  
This animal study was approved by University of Hampshire Ethics Committee - approval: 2016-9876. Rats were housed in colony cages in an automatically temperature controlled room and kept under a 12:12h light:dark cycle with white lighting. Water and feed were available ad libitum.

[Copy](#) [Reset](#)

Figure 1. EthicsGen leads authors through a series of questions to build an animal research ethics statement.

- description of waiver, if no approval received;
- full name of ethics committee;
- ethics approval number; and
- animal care and welfare statement.

Full information such as approval numbers are not always required by journals but provides a more in-depth statement. Animal care and welfare legislation varies between countries, so a free-form welfare statement is encouraged to provide details to the journal.

### Human Subjects Research Ethics

Human subjects research ethics follows a similar pattern, but a statement of informed consent is also included. The following elements are considered (Figure 2):

- participation of humans;
- receipt of approval from institutional ethics committee;
- description of waiver, if no approval received;
- full name of ethics committee;
- ethics approval number;
- participation of under-18s;

- participation of over-18s;
- written informed consent; and
- verbal consent plus approval for verbal consent.

Authors are also invited to confirm that their study was completed according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Field Studies

While these studies do not always require full ethics statements, there are elements that authors are often requested to disclose in their manuscript. These include (Figure 3):

- a statement that the work was a field study;
- details of whether the land accessed (if any) was public or private; and
- details of any interaction with protected species.

### Non-native English Speakers

To further assist non-native English speakers, we will shortly be introducing a Chinese language option. This webpage will provide full instructions in simplified Chinese characters, allowing

## Human

Did your study include the participation of humans?  Yes  No

Was your study performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki?  Yes  No

Did you receive approval from your institution's ethics committee or review board?  Yes  No

Enter the full name of the ethics committee or review board

Do you want to provide an ethics approval number?  Yes  No

Enter the ethics approval number:

## Consent

### Under 18

Did your study include under 18s?  Yes  No

### Over 18

Did your study include over 18s?  Yes  No

Did you receive written consent?  Yes  No

Did you receive verbal consent?  Yes  No

Was this verbal consent approved by your institution's ethics committee or review board?  Yes  No

Why was verbal consent taken instead of written?

Verbal consent was taken because...

How was verbal consent recorded/documentated?

The verbal consent process was recorded/documentated by...

**Generated Ethics Statement:**

This study was performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. This human study was approved by University of Hampshire Ethics Committee - approval: 2016-9876. All adult participants provided verbal consent to participate in this study and this was approved by our IRB and was because there is a high incidence of illiteracy in the area of research. The verbal consent process was recorded/documentated by an audio recording...

Figure 2. EthicsGen can generate a human subjects research ethics statement which takes into account both consent of minors and non-written consent.

## Field Study

Did your study involve field studies (i.e involving non-vertebrates, plant species, non-living materials)?

Yes  No

### Public Land

Was your study conducted on public land owned by a local or national authority, i.e national park, university/institute or other protected area of land or sea, regulatory body concerned with protection of wildlife, etc.?

Yes  No

Was permission provided for the study conducted on public land?

Yes  No

Enter the full name of the authority or individual who provided permission for the study conducted on public land

### Private Land

Was your study conducted on private land?

Yes  No

### Species

Did your studies involve endangered or protected species?

Yes  No

Provide details (names and/or references) of the protected species sampled in your study

**Generated Ethics Statement:**

Permission for the field study conducted on public land was provided by National Parks Authority. Our study included the following protected species: Orchid ABC.

Figure 3. EthicsGen encourages the declaration of research involving endangered and protected species.

in-depth understanding of the ethics requirements. Authors will then be instructed to enter their answers in English to build a complete ethics statement. Other languages will following in future releases.

## Future Development

EthicsGen is still under development and we would be very interested to receive any feedback regarding current or future functionality. Please contact us via email ([ethicsgen@gmail.com](mailto:ethicsgen@gmail.com)) or Twitter ([@ethicsgen](https://twitter.com/ethicsgen)).

## Discovering Our Roots: The Glitch in the Glamour

*Three ways technology has made our jobs more difficult*

**By: Stephanie Kinnan**

**Editorial Assistant**

**GIE: Gastrointestinal Endoscopy**

Do you remember the days before smart phones? The days before we held the world in the palm of our hand? How about the time before the internet, before technology put an infinite pool of information at our fingertips? I know; it's hard to remember, right? How would you know what to wear in the morning without Siri informing you of the weather? *Are thermometers still a thing?* How would you keep from getting lost without that sweet British lady barking out turns from your GPS? *Do we still teach children how to read maps?* Most importantly, how would you ever make it through the line at the DMV without the satisfying crush of little digital candies or the sweet chirps of angry birds? It would seem that technology has improved every aspect of our daily lives. As for our work lives in the editorial and publishing worlds, *forgetaboutit!* We could never return to the dark ages of mailing manuscripts and writing in edits by hand, and God forbid we go one day without combing through e-mails. However, technology may not have made our work lives as perfect as they seem. Here are three ways in which technology has actually failed our field.

1. Copyright infringement: The good old "copy and paste" combo may be something we can no longer imagine living without, but that's also true for the plagiarists of the world. Want to write a manuscript without putting in the work? A quick Google search will put all the content you could ever need at your disposal. There are rampant misconceptions that because information is out there and online for everyone's perusal, it is also free to pilfer. It is not unusual for authors to discover entire articles they have written republished under another's name. Modern technology has made stealing the work of others as easy as pie, or should I say as easy as cut and paste?
2. Illegally obtained content: I think we can safely thank Napster for predicating a culture that expects everything to be available to us without costing a dime. So, an article you want to read is stuck behind a pay wall? No problem. There are more and more websites popping up that help you illegally obtain any content you desire. Most individuals scouring the internet for information don't even realize that they are reading illegally acquired content. These sites have certainly become a pain in the publishing butt.
3. Reliable resources: The wealth of information on the internet is constantly expanding. It seems like every Tom, Dick, and Harry has found their voice online; whether or not those voices have anything factual and intelligent to say is another story. Unfortunately, this can mean wading through a lot of bunk to find reliable information. In the world of publishing, we have to worry about the content of our publications. Which journals are trustworthy? Which references are legitimate? With infinite available resources, technology has made vetting content a tricky area to navigate.

And so, although technology improved the efficiency of the world of editing and publishing, it also brought with it a few very substantial obstacles to overcome. You think they have an app for that?

---

Adapted in part from:

1. Michael Poh. 5 Amazing Things Internet May Have Ruined. Hongkiat. <http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/things-internet-may-have-ruined/>. Accessed March 25, 2016.