

Truth and transparency

To promote transparency and honesty, it is important for corresponding authors to divulge any financial interests that may affect how their articles are perceived.

For a number of years, Nature journals have required corresponding authors of accepted manuscripts to specify any “competing financial interests” that may benefit from the publication of their paper. The reason for this request is simple: to provide greater transparency for readers. We have always believed it to be only fair and reasonable for readers to be provided with contextual information that may influence their perception of an article.

The value of such declarations is clear for articles making claims about the applicability or advantages of a new technique or technology that may financially benefit related parties. However, such declarations are not only for the benefit of the reader; they also serve to protect authors from potential embarrassment and accusations of hiding pertinent information.

Financial interests that fall under the umbrella of this policy include employment by or investments in commercial organizations that may benefit from the findings reported in the paper. For example, any financial stake or participation in consultancy or prospective start-up activities related to the science presented in a paper

should be declared, as should employment by a company that actively supports the work. Likewise, funding bodies or individuals must be declared if they have a commercial interest in the work.

Another common category of financial interest relates to intellectual property. If an author has been named as an inventor on a filed or granted patent pertaining to a technique or technology that is central to a paper, then they should provide details as the publication of the paper could enhance the credibility and value of the patent.

The need to specify competing financial interests is especially relevant to the field of photonics, where commercialization of technology is commonplace, as is the filing of patents to create and protect intellectual property. We appreciate it is not always obvious when it is appropriate to declare such interests, so we encourage authors to err on the side of caution by making a declaration if in doubt — it is better to be safe than sorry. Don't hesitate to contact the editors for further guidance if you are uncertain.

It is important to understand that the policy also applies to reviewers: if you are invited to review a paper, please inform the

editors of any financial or other interests that could be perceived as being a conflict of interest and thus biasing your opinion.

For those wishing to make declarations, we have now made the process as easy as possible. For authors of primary research papers submitted via our online manuscript system, there is a tick box as part of the submission process and a text box for providing details. For authors of other material such as News & Views, Correspondence or Commentaries, as part of the commissioning process, we provide a link to an online form that should be completed prior to publication.

It should be noted that the existence of a filed or granted patent does not compromise the originality or exclusivity of findings submitted to us, and hence does not jeopardize the acceptance of a manuscript. The information contained in a patent, its presentation and the way it has been vetted differ greatly from a typical scientific paper. A patent does not usually contain quantitative primary research data such as graphical data or images or the results of simulations or experiments, and it has not been subjected to peer review by the scientific community.

Prospective authors should also bear in mind that the publication of a scientific paper could be considered as a form of open disclosure, which may make it difficult, or even impossible, to file a patent for a technique or concept discussed in detail in the paper.

For research performed solely at a company or as part of an academic–industrial collaboration, it is important that the commercial parties decide prior to submission that they are willing to provide sufficient details of the processes and methods employed in the research. This ensures that the paper is able to make a meaningful and useful contribution that can be fully assessed and interpreted by the wider community. Withholding information on the basis that the details are proprietary or might be subject to a future patent application may severely reduce the value of the paper, thus providing a sufficient reason for declining its publication.

A detailed description of our competing financial interest policy can be found at <http://www.nature.com/authors/policies/competing.html>.



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