

An FAQ on Intellectual Property Rights for IEEE Authors

In preparing and submitting manuscripts to IEEE, authors often have questions about transferring copyright, posting their accepted papers online, and reusing previously published material. The following FAQ contains key information gathered from IEEE policies in order to provide authors with answers to their questions about intellectual property rights pertaining to their papers.

1. Originality of Content

- Can an author submit a paper to more than one publication for consideration?
- Can an author submit a previously published paper for consideration in a new publication?
- Can an author revise and submit previously published material?
- Does IEEE consider an author posting her paper on a preprint server or on her company's web site to be a form of prior publication, which may then disqualify the paper from further editorial consideration?

2. Authors' Rights to Post Accepted Versions of Papers

- Can an author post his IEEE copyrighted paper on his personal or institution's server?
- How does IEEE define an "accepted" version?
- How is "published" version defined?
- Why does IEEE allow the accepted version of the paper to be posted by an author and not the final, published version?
- Does IEEE policy affect how an author posts her manuscript on a preprint server such as TechRxiv or ArXiv?
- Are authors required to remove any final, published versions of their papers previously posted on their web sites?

3. Plagiarism

- What is plagiarism?
- Is there an acceptable, minimum-level of copying where crediting the original is not required?
- How can an author avoid plagiarizing when reusing another author's work?
- If an author discovers an example of suspected plagiarism in an IEEE publication, what steps should be taken?
- What are the IEEE Plagiarism Guidelines, and what are the levels of misconduct described in the Guidelines?

4. Copyright

- Is copyright transfer required?
- What happens when an author signs the IEEE Copyright Form?
- How is an author's copyright status determined?
- What is the IEEE Electronic Copyright Form?

1. Originality of Content

IEEE policy states that an author must disclose whether or not a submitted manuscript has been published previously or if it is still under active consideration by another publication. Also, if an author submits a manuscript to a non-IEEE publication while that manuscript is under review by IEEE, the author must notify IEEE about the additional submission.

- **Can an author submit a paper to more than one publication for consideration?**
No. An author should only submit original work that has neither appeared elsewhere for publication, nor which is under review for another refereed publication.
- **Can an author submit a previously published paper for consideration in a new publication?**
Yes, but only if the author has fully referenced the original publication, and has informed the editor of the new publication of the previous publication. The author also must acquire any necessary permission from the original publishers.
- **Can an author revise and submit previously published material?**
Yes. It is common in technical publishing for material to be presented at various stages of its evolution. As one example, this can take the form of publishing early ideas in a workshop, more developed work in a conference and fully developed contributions as journal or transactions papers. The IEEE recognizes the importance of this evolutionary publication process as a significant means of scientific communication and fully supports this publishing paradigm. At the same time the IEEE requires that this evolutionary process be fully referenced. Guidelines for referencing can be found in Section 8.2.9 of the [IEEE Publication Services and Products Board Operations Manual](#).
- **Does IEEE consider an author posting her paper on preprint servers or on her company's web sites to be a form of prior publication, which may then disqualify the paper from further editorial consideration?**
No. IEEE policy allows an author to submit previously posted papers to IEEE publications for consideration as long as she is able to transfer copyright to IEEE, i.e., she had not transferred copyright to another party prior to submission.

2. Authors' Rights to Post Accepted Versions of Papers

In November 2010, the Publication Services and Product Board revised policy on authors' posting of their IEEE copyrighted works in order to exercise better control over IEEE's intellectual property, while still offering authors essential reuse of their own created works. The new policy retains substantial rights for authors to post on their personal sites and their institutions' servers, but only the accepted versions of their papers.

- **Can an author post his IEEE copyrighted paper on his personal or institutions' servers?**
Yes. An author is permitted to post his IEEE copyrighted paper on his personal site and his institution's server, but only the accepted version of his paper, not the published version as might be downloaded from IEEE Xplore.

- **How does IEEE define an “accepted” version?**

An accepted manuscript is a version which has been revised by an author to incorporate review suggestions, and which has been accepted by IEEE for publication.

- **How is “published” version defined?**

The final, published version is the reviewed and accepted manuscript, with copy-editing, proofreading and formatting added by IEEE.

- **Why does IEEE allow the accepted version of the paper to be posted by an author and not the final, published version?**

The IEEE recognizes the need for authors to share and develop their work with colleagues and peers. Permitting an author to post the accepted version of her paper allows this collaborative effort while preserving the value of IEEE's electronic database, which currently serves as the focus for a sustained, global community of authors, reviewers and researchers. With users accessing the final, published version of articles at IEEE Xplore, the IEEE is better able to track usage of articles for the benefit of authors and journals.

- **Can an author post his manuscript on a preprint server such as TechRxiv or ArXiv?**

Yes. The IEEE recognizes that many authors share their unpublished manuscripts on public sites. Once manuscripts have been accepted for publication by IEEE, an author is required to post an IEEE copyright notice on his preprint. Upon publication, the author must replace the preprint with either 1) the full citation to the IEEE work with Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) or a link to the paper's abstract in IEEE Xplore, or 2) the accepted version only (not the IEEE-published version), including the IEEE copyright notice and full citation, with a link to the final, published paper in IEEE Xplore.

- **Are authors required to remove any final, published versions of their papers previously posted on their web sites?**

No. The new policy was approved in November 2010 and applies to papers published beginning in January 2011. Final, published versions of papers that were posted before January 2011 do not need to be removed.

3. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is considered an act of author misconduct, although it does not mean it was done intentionally. Neglecting to properly cite reused work, either by choice or by accident, is considered to be plagiarism.

- **What is plagiarism?**

IEEE defines plagiarism as the reuse of someone else's prior ideas, processes, results, or words without explicitly acknowledging the original author and source.

- **Is there an acceptable, minimum-level of copying where crediting the original is not required?**

No. Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and is considered a serious breach of professional conduct, with potentially severe ethical and legal consequences.

- **How can an author avoid plagiarizing when reusing another author's work?**

If an author's reuses another author's work for information that appears in his paper, even if it has been paraphrased, the original sources must be acknowledged. However, information that is common knowledge does not need to be cited. It is recommended to follow a common style of notation when citing references. If substantial material from another author's work is being reused, particularly if it has been used verbatim (not paraphrased), the publisher should be contacted to request permission to reuse the material.

- **If an author discovers that her work has been plagiarized in an IEEE publication, what steps should be taken?**

An author who has discovered her IEEE work was inappropriately reused, either in another IEEE publication or in a non-IEEE publication, should prepare a "case" by collecting as much material as possible. For example,

1. A marked copy of the original paper showing the specific text that was reused
2. A marked copy of the paper in which the uncredited work appears highlighting specific text
3. A written description of the alleged misconduct
4. Copies of any communications the author might have already had with the "authors" who may have misused the work.

Once all the necessary material is collected, the case should be submitted to the editor of the publication (or the sponsoring IEEE Society of the publication) in which the misconduct occurred. If the contact information for the editor is unavailable, the case should be sent to the IEEE Intellectual Property Rights Office.

- **What are the IEEE Plagiarism Guidelines, and what are the levels of misconduct described in the Guidelines?**

Section 8.2.4 of the [PSPB Operations Manual](#) contains a section entitled "Guidelines for Adjudicating Different Levels of Plagiarism." The purpose of this section is to define plagiarism, the five levels or degrees of plagiarism, and the appropriate corrective actions that correspond to each level of misconduct. The five levels of plagiarism are:

Level One, which pertains to the uncredited verbatim copying of a full paper, or the verbatim copying of a major portion (> 50%), or verbatim copying within more than one paper by the same author(s).

Level Two, which pertains to the uncredited verbatim copying of large portion (between 20 and 50%) or verbatim copying within more than one paper by the same author(s).

Level Three, which pertains to the uncredited verbatim copying of individual elements (e.g., paragraphs, sentences, illustrations) resulting in a significant portion (up to 20%) within a paper.

Level Four, which pertains to uncredited improper paraphrasing of pages or paragraphs

Level Five, which pertains to the credited verbatim copying of a major portion of a paper without clear delineation (e.g., quotes or indents)

4. Copyright

Copyright is one of a group of intellectual property rights that are intended to protect the interests of an author or copyright owner. In other words, these rights give an author/owner nearly exclusive control over the use of his/her work.

- **Is copyright transfer required for an author's paper to be published?**

Yes. IEEE policy requires that prior to publication all authors or their employers must transfer to the IEEE in writing any copyright they hold for their individual papers. Transferring copyright is a necessary requirement for publication, except for material in the public domain or which is reprinted with permission from a previously published, copyrighted publication.

- **What happens when an author signs the IEEE Copyright Form?**

When an author signs the IEEE Copyright Form, she is transferring ownership of the copyright of her work to the IEEE. In other words, the IEEE becomes owner of the paper when an author signs, dates and submits her corresponding IEEE Copyright Form.

- **How is an author's copyright status determined?**

The author's copyright status is determined to a large extent by the employer status for whom the author works. For example, if an author is employed by the U.S. Government, and is the sole author of a paper, then the author should sign the "IEEE Copyright Form for U.S. Government Employees." If the author is employed by the U.S. Government, but the coauthors are in private industry, then one of the coauthors should sign the IEEE Copyright Form. If a sole author of a paper is employed by a Crown Government, then copyright to the paper will remain with the Crown government. The author should sign the "IEEE Copyright Form for Works Subject to Crown Copyright." However, if an author is employed by a Crown government, but the coauthors are in private industry, then one of the coauthors should sign the IEEE Copyright Form.

- **What is the IEEE Electronic Copyright Form?**

The IEEE eCF is a fully digital version of the IEEE Copyright Form. It includes an important feature (the Wizard) that, through a series of questions and replies, determines the author's copyright status and brings the author to the appropriate Form to sign. An author "signs" the eCF simply by typing his name at the proper location.