
This site I like

Retraction Watch

<https://retractionwatch.com/>

Probably the most well known case of retraction is Wakefield's paper which suggested a correlation between the MMR vaccine and autism in children. The article was retracted in 2010, 12 years after its publication.

Since then, the number of retracted scientific publications has risen sharply. According to retractionsdatabase.org, there were 36 retractions in 2000 and 1359 in 2016. A possible explanation of this growth may be an increased awareness of these issues, rather than an increase in publication of flawed articles.

"Retraction" itself is not a bad word. The main purpose of retractions is to assure the integrity and accuracy of scientific literature. Besides, mistakes can happen. But it has been noticed that the majority of retractions are attributable to misconduct, including duplicate publication, plagiarism and fraud, faked data or fake peer review. So, irrespective of the cause, the increase in the number and frequency of retractions can be considered as indicators of the health of scientific publishing.

Retraction Watch (<https://retractionwatch.com/>) offers a window into the world of retractions. Launched in 2010 as a blog to monitor retractions, it tracks the case of retractions, making these studies easier to spot. Also, when available, it reports on institutional investigations into misconduct.

The website not only publishes cases, but also the stories behind them. This offers an insight into scientific publishing and how complex the relationships can be between publishers, editors, and authors. Furthermore, the blog encourages a more open debate about research integrity, disseminating best practice and increasing transparency in science publishing.

A section of the website is dedicated to the Center for Scientific Integrity, the parent organisation of Retraction Watch. They are developing a database of retractions, expressions of concern and related publishing events. A beta version of the database is freely available at retractionsdatabase.org. Here you can search by country, author, DOI, reason for retraction, and journal.

Posts on Retraction Watch are categorised, so that readers can sort posts by reason for retraction, journal or country. A search tool allows to search by keywords (and if you think that the world of retractions is a boring one, I suggest searching for the following article: "My dog ate the data: Eight excuses journal editors hear").

What can journal editors, considered as gatekeepers of research integrity, do in cases of suspected misconduct? In its "Retraction guidelines", the COPE lists the cases in which journal editors should consider retracting a paper and describes what form a retraction should take. Anyway, many issues, such as the formats of amendment to be published, in the spectrum between erratum and retraction, are still discussed.

Ivan Oransky is one of the founders, with Adam Marcus, of Retraction Watch. We asked him the main reasons why journal editors should read it.

What are the reasons why journal editors should read Retraction Watch?

Many journal editors are among frequent readers of Retraction Watch. They use the site to keep up with trends in retractions, scientific publishing, and related issues. Often, our coverage raises questions about how a particular editor or publisher has handled a retraction, and that coverage is always improved when those involved decide to share their views with us. In at least one case, a journal improved its policies after our criticism. Every field, it seems, has lessons to teach – and learn from – other fields. Our hope is that shining a light on the variations in policy and practice will help everyone improve efforts to correct the scientific record.

Can you describe a case in which the editor was particularly useful to find a solution in a difficult situation of retraction?

Editors are – or at least should be – intimately involved in every retraction, of course. The field of anaesthesiology provides rich examples of just how important editors can be in the process. After being caught unaware in 2008 by the case of Scott Reuben, who had to retract 25 papers – and ended up in prison – for making up data, at least one editor was prepared shortly thereafter when he began hearing allegations about Joachim Boldt, another prolific researcher. Steven Shafer, then the editor of *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, gathered a coalition of journal editors and made sure they acted on those allegations, while forwarding all of them to the institutions where Boldt had worked. (Shafer is now a member of the board of directors of The Center For Scientific Integrity.) Boldt ended up with 96 retractions. Shafer and another journal editor, Steve Yentis, did the same when confronted with allegations about another prolific fraudster, Yoshitaka Fujii – who now has the top spot on our retraction leaderboard, right ahead of Boldt. These cases are important reminders of how editors can take a leadership role and leverage their power to police the scientific record, and even urge universities – who are not always eager to investigate their own – to act.

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