

Editorial policies

Editorial policies

ST-OPEN focuses on selecting and peer reviewing original submissions from all fields of science and helps students and their supervisors publish scientific articles based on their graduation (master's) and doctoral theses from the University of Split and other members of the University of the Seas Alliance ([SEA-EU](#)).

Dedication to excellence

ST-OPEN provides training for editors and reviewers and has policies on diverse aspects of peer review, especially for the adoption of appropriate models of review and processes for handling conflicts of interest, appeals and disputes that may arise in peer review. ST-OPEN is also a member of the [Croatian Association for Scholarly Communication](#), which belongs to the Croatian Chapter of the [European Association of Science Editors](#) (EASE). ST-OPEN editors are regularly trained in responsible publishing and they, in turn, further train university staff, students and their supervisors, and peer reviewers.

All decisions on submitted manuscripts are made by senior editors, who have full editorial independence in these decisions. Other editors and the Editorial office work on manuscript submission, editing and publishing the journal. The primary task of the Editorial Board is to actively search for submission, participate in the peer review, and actively contribute to the development of the journal. The Advisory Board provides strategic support to the journal and its development.

Author helpful policy

Due to the nature of ST-OPEN as an overlay journal and its educational mission, the editors will, in principle, contact potential authors (students) who have their works uploaded into the university repository. Members of the ST-OPEN Editorial Board select a thesis (or other work) of interest to the journal, and ST-OPEN editors approach the supervisor and the student and offer to work with them on transforming the thesis into a manuscript in English. The initial publication (thesis) in the repository is considered to be the non-reviewed pre-print version of the article.

We also encourage potential authors to contact the editors for a pre-submission inquiry; we will promptly respond on the suitability of the manuscript for ST-OPEN.

ST-OPEN does not restrict the length of the manuscript and only requires it to present original research results. ST-OPEN editors work with the authors, using the [author-helpful policy developed by the Croatian Medical Journal](#).

Peer review

ST-OPEN uses peer review to obtain the advice of experts about the quality of the submissions and their relevance to the journal. OJS – and open-source, secure online system is used for manuscript submission and peer review management. All authors receive acknowledgment of manuscript submission.

All research articles are submitted to external peer review and reviewed by at least two reviewers. The provenance of the articles (commissioned or externally peer reviewed) is clearly indicated in the declaration in the published article.

The manuscripts from graduate and doctoral students written in Croatian are first sent for an official intramural review by experts in the research field suggested by the members of the Editorial team. Accepted manuscripts from this first step are then translated into English by ST-OPEN by the University service and sent out for international, independent peer review to at least two relevant experts. Editors-in-Chief make decisions on manuscripts after this external review, taking into consideration reviewer's comments. All reviewed articles are treated confidentially prior to their publication.

Due to the focus on graduate student research already deposited in university repositories, ST-OPEN uses a single-masked type of peer review for all submissions. Guidance for peer reviewers is available in the submission system, as well as through the navigation menu under the [“About”](#) section. Reviewers are asked to maintain the confidentiality of the manuscript. This means that the manuscript cannot be uploaded to an artificial intelligence (AI) tool to generate the peer review report. Reviewers must disclose if and how the AI technology was used in their review, and they have to be aware that AI can generate incorrect, incomplete and biased output.

The reviewers are asked to declare their potential competing interests in relation to the submitted article. They keep the copyright of their peer reviews, which are kept in the online submission system, and also have a choice of making their identity known to the authors by signing their review report.

The authors may suggest potential reviewers for their manuscript, provided that they do not have competing interests (joint publications and/or projects in the last five years, family and relatives, and other). The editors reserve the right to independently decide on the reviewers for individual manuscripts. The editors will also take into consideration the request from authors for excluding certain reviewers, but they deserve the right to make the final decision on the suitability of the request. Peer review of original articles authored by decision-making editors (all senior editors) is conducted outside of the online submission system by a separately appointed external editor, who makes the decision on the manuscripts.

Editorial research

We are keen to better understand and improve editorial conduct, decision-making, issues related to peer review and communication of science in general. Therefore, we occasionally take part in or conduct editorial research, so that submitted manuscripts and reviewers' reports might be used in such research. If you do not want your manuscript or your review comments entered into such a study, please let us know in your submission letter or agreement to review. Your decision to take part or not will have no effect on the editorial decision on the submitted manuscript.

Privacy policy

ST-OPEN processes personal information related to the submitted manuscripts, and is dedicated to the protection of personal data, as outlined in ST-OPEN [Privacy statement](#).

Post-publication discussions

ST-OPEN encourages post-publication debate through letters to the editor. Post-publication comments and correction will be published beside the original article to allow readers easy access to the latest version. All versions will be permanently available and linked to original publication. The journal mechanisms for correcting, revising or retracting articles after publication are guided by the COPE guidelines.

Journal management

Management of ST-OPEN is described in the journal's bylaws, approved by the Senate of the University of Split, and ensures full responsibility and independence of the Editor and the ST-OPEN editorial bodies. The editors have full independence in all editorial issues.

Publication ethics

ST-OPEN pays special attention to responsible, transparent and ethical publication of research reports. Publication ethics policies and responses to allegations of misconduct in relation to these policies are described in detail. We take seriously any pre-publication and post-publication allegations of misconduct.

Allegation of misconduct

ST-OPEN follows COPE policies and flowcharts on how to handle allegations about submitted and published articles. We define serious research misconduct as fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, but also consider a spectrum of poor research practices that have an overall detrimental impact on research and needs to be recognized and corrected if necessary. Plagiarism and self-plagiarism, as well as the simultaneous submissions of the article (results) to more than one journal, are not acceptable.

All allegations of misconduct should be directed to the ST-OPEN Research Integrity Editor, who is independent from the editors and is not involved in editorial decision-making and

publication processes. The Research Integrity Editor also ensures that the journal actively promotes responsible research and publication, as well as prevents publication of articles with flawed research and/or publication misconduct, including the misconduct related to peer review and checking for text similarity of all submitted manuscripts (Plagscan or Turnitin tools). The Research Integrity Editor will respond to allegations made [directly to the journal](#) or [outside the journal, in the public domain](#). The journal will address allegations of publication or research misconduct according to the COPE guidance, following the [COPE Flowcharts](#), and correct the published record when necessary. When necessary, the process will involve other journals and institutions. ST-OPEN does not have the authority for punitive actions, which are the responsibility of the institutions and employers.

Authorship and contributorship

ST-OPEN publishes research from all scientific disciplines, which differently define authorship and recognition of research contributions. Therefore, we ask the authors to write in their own words why they think they deserve authorship of the submitted manuscript, following the practice of their research field.

By submitting the manuscript to the journal, the corresponding author confirms that all authors have approved its publication. Authorship declarations have to be signed by all authors, and authors declared contributions to the research are published at the end of the article.

ST-OPEN requires that the authorship is based on substantial and intellectual contribution to research and writing. We consider that the definition of authorship from the [International Committee of Medical Journal Editors \(ICMJE\)](#) best reflects deserved authorship. The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria: “1) Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; and 2) Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) Final approval of the version to be published; and 4) Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.” We also emphasize the ICMJE recommendation that those authors who contributed to the research should be offered to contribute to the writing of the manuscript, so that they can deserve the article authorship.

We discourage the misuse of authorship: ghost authors (those who significantly contributed to the manuscript but are not listed as authors), guest authors (giving authorship to prominent researchers to increase the “value” of the manuscript, without their contribution) and gift authorship (giving authorship to those who did not contribute to the manuscript at all).

ST-OPEN links ORCID identifiers to the authors in the manuscript by-line.

ST-OPEN does not consider artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technologies to be legitimate authors. Only legitimate authors are ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of the work. Authors using AI in the writing process should follow these requirements:

- AI should be used only to improve readability and language of the manuscript, and not to replace researcher's tasks to interpret the data or make scientific conclusions.
- AI technology should be applied with human oversight and control. The resulting text should be carefully reviewed and edited for correctness, completeness and bias.
- AI-assisted technology cannot be listed as an author or co-author nor should it be cited as an author.
- The use of AI should be disclosed in the manuscript. This should be in a form of a declaration statement at the end of the manuscript: Declaration of AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work the author(s) used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON]. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication." This declaration does not apply to the use of basic editing tools, such as those for checking grammar, spelling and references. If there is nothing to disclose, this declaration is not necessary.

Allegations of authorship misuse should be directed to the ST-OPEN Research Integrity Editor and will be handled according to the [COPE Flowcharts](#). Requests for changes in authorship before or after the publication should be directed to the editors, in a form of a letter signed by all original authors on the manuscript.

Complaints and appeals

ST-OPEN considers appeals on rejected manuscripts provided that the authors can demonstrate that the decision on their manuscript was flawed or not in line with the journal's policies. For an appeal to be considered, authors must provide a detailed point-by-point response to all the concerns raised by the reviewers or editors involved with the manuscript. The authors do not have to provide a revised manuscript during the appeal process. All decisions made on appeals are final, and the decision process could take longer than with original submissions. Appeals must be made within 30 days of the manuscript reject decision.

Complaints against journal policies or journal processes should be directed to the ST-OPEN Research Integrity Editor, who will perform relevant investigation and audit.

Competing interests

ST-OPEN supports transparency for reporting all financial and personal relationships that might bias the publication process. We define conflict of interests as situations in which professional judgment concerning the validity of research may be influenced by a secondary interest, such as financial gain to a researcher or its immediate family members, or intellectual passion. Perceptions of conflict of interest are considered to be actual conflicts of interest.

We ask authors to declare their possible competing interests when they submit the manuscripts, which will be shared with the reviewers and are published in the article. Funding for the research must also be declared. The declaration of competing interest is required and is published for all articles.

In order to ensure the objectivity of peer review, as well as public confidence in the published material, we ask reviewers to declare their own competing interests. Reviewers with clear conflict of interest are removed from the review process and alternative reviewers are engaged. A reviewer who is not certain about the existence of a competing interests should contact the editorial office for advice.

ST-OPEN will also regularly disclose competing interest declarations from the Editor in Chief and Editorial office members. As the editors and Editorial Board members at ST-OPEN are active professionals and researchers, it may happen that they would want to submit their articles to ST-OPEN. This represents a potential conflict of interest, especially in cases of submissions from decision-making editors.

In reviewing submissions from its editors and Editorial Board or Advisory Board members, ST-OPEN follows the guidelines for good editorial practice set by international editorial organizations, such as the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and COPE.

Members of the Editorial Board and Advisory Board are not decision-making editors, so they do not have editorial oversight of the peer review process or access to submitted articles they are invited as a peer reviewer for a specific manuscript. Their submissions are handled by the editorial team in the same way as other submissions and the same high level of confidentiality.

As ST-OPEN decision-making editors are active researchers, they may in rare occasions submit their original articles to ST-OPEN. The review of these manuscripts will not be handled by the submitting editor(s); the review process will be supervised and the decisions made by a senior editor who will act independently of the other editors. In some cases, the review process will be handled by an outside independent expert to minimize possible bias in reviewing submissions from editors. If any editor(s) submit(s) their article, this will be disclosed in a published article: "Firstname Surname is the [role in journal] of ST-OPEN. To ensure that any possible conflict of interest relevant to the journal has been addressed, this article was reviewed according to best practice guidelines of international editorial organizations."

Allegations of undisclosed conflicts of interest should be directed to the ST-OPEN Research Integrity Editor, which will be handled according to the [COPE Flow Charts](#).

Data and reproducibility

ST-OPEN follows COPE guidelines on data and reproducibility. We recommend pre-registration of study protocols and sharing of all data supporting research results, including raw data, whenever legally and ethically possible. Clinical trials should be registered before the recruitment of the first participant, as per [ICMJE policy](#).

ST-OPEN can host research data on a local server, but we strongly recommend that our authors submit datasets to an appropriate public data repository. For Croatian authors with central [AAI@EduHr](#) login service, ST-OPEN recommends using the [DABAR repository](#).

ST-OPEN does not mandate repository selection. The repositories selected may be either cross-disciplinary general repositories or discipline-specific repositories that accept spe-

cific types of structured data. However, the selected data repositories should meet the following requirements:

- Allow public access to data and open licenses (CC0 and CC-BY, or their equivalents, are required in most cases) (exceptions are allowed for sensitive, human-derived data).
- Provide persistent identifiers.
- Ensure long-term preservation of the dataset.
- Allow confidential review of submitted datasets without requiring reviewers to disclose identifying information.

In selecting appropriate repositories for their data, authors are encouraged to use resources such as DataCite's [Repository Finder](#) or FAIRsharing Registry of Research Data Repositories ([Re3Data](#)).

We encourage the use of reporting guidelines and other study designs according to standard practice in the authors' research area. A comprehensive list of reporting guidelines can be found at [EQUATOR Network](#). Authors must submit the appropriate reporting checklist with their manuscript (e.g., STROBE for observational studies, PRISMA for systematic reviews, SRQR/COREQ for qualitative studies, ARRIVE for preclinical animal research).

ST-OPEN recommends that the authors of articles with digital images make sure that modifications to the digital images are kept to the minimum and clearly indicated in the figure legend, and that all information in the image is not changed by these manipulations. Please consult the document on recommendations for handling image integrity issues from the [STM Working Group](#) about what types or image alterations are allowed and under which conditions.

Ethical oversight

The issues on integrity in research and publication are too diverse and large to be presented in full detail here, so we state that the ST-OPEN fully endorses the policies and guidance of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) outlined in the Core Practice Checklist.

We require the authors to provide statements addressing ethics issues related to the research presented in the article, including but not limited to the participation of human individuals in research, use of animals in research, protection of the privacy of data, and health, safety and environment issues. We are aware of different ethics standards in different disciplines (e.g. [social sciences and humanities](#) vs. [medical sciences](#)), and expect the authors to follow best practices in their fields.

For medical research involving human subjects, we specifically emphasize the requirement for ethical conduct of research and protection of privacy of patients and study subjects, as defined in the latest issue of the [Declaration of Helsinki – Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects](#), developed by the World Medical Association. This includes mandatory registration of clinical trials in a public trail registry as a condition for manuscript submission to ST-OPEN, as defined in the [ICMJE registration policy](#). If the study protocol for a clinical or non-clinical study was registered, the authors must

include this information in the Methods section, as well as the last section of the Abstract (“Registration”).

For studies involving human participants, we require the authors to provide proof of ethical approval or ethics waiver, with details of the relevant ethics committee (including the registry number of the approval). For studies involving human participants, we require the authors to provide information on how informed consent was obtained; for vulnerable groups, a full methodology for obtaining consent will need to be outlined. If anonymization was not possible and the participants have to be identified, we require the authors to provide the declaration that consent forms from the participants was obtained for the publication of the image or data. A template of the consent form for publication should be submitted (not the actual signed form). Although it is not possible to fully anonymise photos of individual persons, the authors should ensure that published photographs present only the area of pathology and as few facial features possible.

For studies involving personal data, a statement on how these data have been protected should be provided in the Methods section.

For research involving animals, authors should follow institutional, national, and international standards for the care and use of laboratory animals and report it in the submitted manuscripts. We direct the authors to the guidance from the European Union on [animals used for scientific purposes](#). For all studies involving animals, we require that the authors provide the information on ethical approval and relevant permissions/certificates for animal experimentation in the Methods section. Articles describing animal experimentation should be reported according to the [ARRIVE reporting guideline](#).

ST-OPEN editors may ask authors to provide raw data for the manuscript for editorial review. Authors should also retain all raw data underlying their article for a reasonable time after publication. If authors discover a significant error of inaccuracy in the published article, they must notify the editors so that the scientific record is promptly corrected.

Intellectual property and publishing license

Submission of a manuscript is taken to indicate the author’s commitment to publish in the ST-OPEN if the manuscript is accepted. ST-OPEN respects the fact that authors’ qualification works deposited in the DABAR repository may be under different types of access. ST-OPEN also accepts submissions based on manuscripts published as preprints. Authors submitting manuscripts directly must indicate in the manuscript that the work has been presented in a preprint. If the article is published, the authors must update the information on the preprint server about the final publication. If preprints are cited in the manuscripts, such references must be clearly identified as preprints, and their publication status must be checked and corrected if needed at the time of publication in ST-OPEN.

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ST-OPEN does not publish material already published in peer-reviewed platforms (except preprints). Such publication would constitute a duplicate publication. Publication of a conference abstract or presentation is not considered to be a duplicate publication. A legitimate secondary publication of material published in other journals or outlets (e.g. guidelines, statements) is allowed.