



## EDITORIAL

**Email ethics for authors: From the world of publication process**Sumarno Adi Subrata **Author information**

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 adisubrata@ummgl.ac.id <https://doi.org/10.31603/ihs.14027>**Abstract**

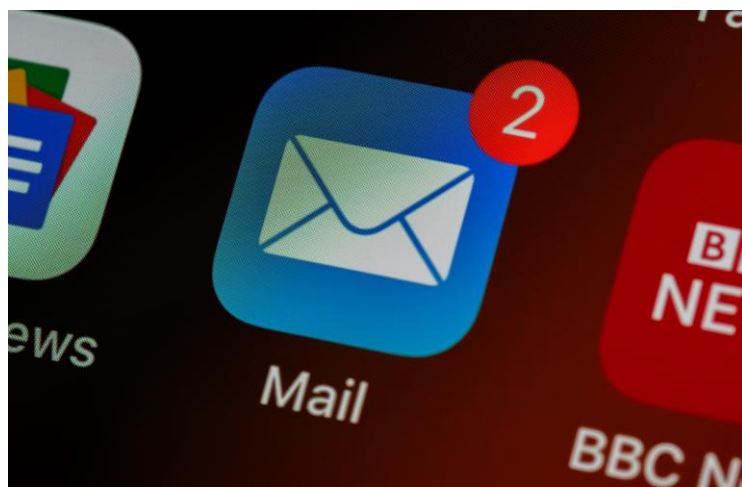
The publication process relies heavily on email communication among authors, editors, and reviewers. However, the informal nature of email can lead to breaches of ethics that compromising the integrity of the publication process. This editorial examines the ethical considerations surrounding email communication in publication, including confidentiality, tone, and content. The article discusses the importance of maintaining confidentiality and avoiding conflicts of interest, as well as the need for clear and respectful communication. Furthermore, this work explores the role of email in peer review, editorial decision-making, and author-editor communication and highlight potential pitfalls and best practices. Establishing guidelines for email ethics can promote transparency, accountability, and professionalism in the publication process. It also can enhance the credibility and reliability of published research in research. Along with that, this editorial provided discussion and guide stakeholders in directing the complexities of email communication. In the context of publishing innovations in health, email communication serves to facilitate collaboration, peer review, and editorial decision-making. For instance, when submitting a manuscript to a health innovation journal, authors rely on email to communicate with editors and reviewers. A breach of confidentiality or unprofessional tone in these interactions can undermine the integrity of the publication process and potentially delay or jeopardize publication. In health innovation research, the accuracy and reliability of findings are crucial for public health policy and practice.

**Keywords:** Academic publication; journal editor; scientific contribution; healthcare science; role models

The publication process is a rigorous journey requiring clear, transparent, and professional communication among all parties involved — authors, editors, reviewers, and publishers (Faiman, 2022). Email is the most common mode of communication in this process, serving as the primary channel for interactions (Ogwu et al., 2020). It facilitates manuscript submission, review requests, editorial decisions, and correspondence about revisions or publication. Given its critical role, adhering to ethical standards in email communication is essential to maintain trust, professionalism, and integrity (Bovi & Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs of the American Medical Association, 2003). Moreover, ethical email communication serves as the bedrock for maintaining the integrity and trust essential to scholarly discourse (Sodeke et al., 2010). In addition to conveying information, every email exchanged throughout the publication lifecycle—from initial manuscript submission to peer review and final editorial decisions—directly impacts the credibility of research findings and the reputation of all parties involved. For instance, in the publication of a new therapeutic device, precise and ethically sound email exchanges between the inventors (authors), the journal editor, and external peer reviewers are critical. This type of communication present that the device's efficacy and safety data are presented accurately, reviewer concerns are addressed constructively, and the editorial process remains transparent and fair. When ethical principles are upheld, the process of disseminating innovations becomes more efficient. This creates an environment where novel treatments and diagnostics can be evaluated and brought to the medical community with confidence. Vice versa, any lapse in ethical email conduct can lead to misunderstandings, delays, or even the propagation of flawed research among researchers and journal editors.

**Perspective of emails ethics**

The perspective of email complexities as a communication medium present unique challenge that necessitate a heightened awareness of ethical considerations (**Figure 1**). Unlike face-to-face conversations or phone calls, email lacks non-verbal cues such as tone of voice or body language. This makes it easy for misinterpretations especially when discussing critiques of health innovation research. For example, a reviewer's concise email comment suggesting



**Figure 1.** Incoming emails notification in the inbox (Courtesy of [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)).

"insufficient detail on clinical trial design" could be perceived as dismissive by an author. Furthermore, the inherent permanence of email means that written exchanges can be stored indefinitely, potentially creating a lasting record. This record could be scrutinized years later that emphasizing the need for thoughtful and precise articulation. The ease with which emails can be forwarded—often without the original sender's knowledge or consent—lead a significant risk to confidentiality, particularly when discussing sensitive, unpublished health data or confidential peer review reports (Adarmouch et al., 2020). For example, an accidental forward of an email containing confidential patient data from a clinical trial could lead to serious ethical breaches and data privacy violations. Therefore, understanding these inherent challenges are important for upholding ethical standards in every digital interaction within the health innovation

publication process. The authors are encouraged to pay close attention in what they are trying to convey to editors or reviewers.

## **Authors' responsibilities in email ethics**

### ***Professionalism and tone in email communication***

One of the foundational principles of email ethics during the publication process is maintaining respect and professionalism in all communications (Musitia et al., 2025). Emails should always be polite, clear, and concise, avoiding informal language, jargon, or any expressions that might be misinterpreted. Respect for confidentiality is paramount, especially when handling peer reviews or editorial comments. Parties must avoid sharing sensitive information with unauthorized individuals. They should also confirm that communications do not violate privacy agreements or intellectual property rights. Authors bear a fundamental ethical responsibility to maintain professionalism and a respectful tone in all email communications throughout the publication process. This reaches further than just using grammatically correct sentences; it encompasses the judicious choice of words, the overall demeanour conveyed, and adherence to standard email etiquette. For instance, when querying an editor about manuscript status, a concise and polite email with a clear subject line like "Inquiry: Manuscript #1234 on Novel Drug Delivery System - [Your Full Name]" is far more effective than a terse that demanding message. Even under the stress of revisions or rejections, authors must consciously avoid emotional or aggressive language, such as accusatory statements or sarcastic remarks directed at reviewers or editorial staff. For example, an email responding to critical peer review feedback on a new surgical technique should meticulously address each point with supportive arguments and a willingness to engage, rather than defensive or dismissive language. Proper salutations (e.g., "Dear Dr. [Editor's last name or full name]"), closings (e.g., "Kind regards," "Sincerely," or "Best regards,"), and a professional email signature are not just courtesies; they are important elements that convey seriousness, respect for the recipient's time, and the author's commitment to scholarly communication. These small details collectively contribute to a positive impression and facilitate a smoother, more collaborative publication experience.

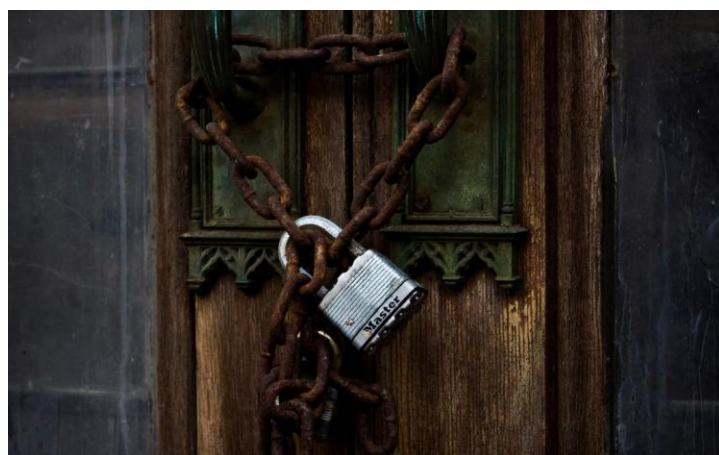
### ***Transparency and honesty in email communication***

The ethical obligations of authors demand absolute transparency and honesty in all email exchanges related to their research and manuscript (Haesevoets et al., 2019). This begins with the accurate representation of research data and findings. Any email discussing results, figures, or methodologies must be truthful and avoid any form of manipulation, selective reporting, plagiarism, or omission of crucial information (Hauser et al., 2018). For a study on a new diagnostic tool, if certain data points were excluded due to unforeseen technical issues, this must be explicitly and honestly communicated. It should be reported in a revised methods section or a direct email to the editor, rather than simply being omitted. Furthermore, authors have a prompt and non-negotiable responsibility to disclose any conflicts of interest—be they financial ties to a pharmaceutical company, personal relationships with potential reviewers, or institutional affiliations that could be perceived as biasing the research. Such disclosures should be proactive, ideally at the point of

submission. They should be reiterated if new conflicts arise during the review process, particularly in sensitive areas like clinical trials for health innovations. For those reasons above, ethical email communication calls for transparency and honesty in every exchange. In the other side, Editors and reviewers should provide objective, constructive, and feedback. Misleading or deceptive communication undermines the credibility of the publication process that can lead to serious ethical breaches. For example, hiding conflicts, submitting fabricated data, or exerting undue influence through emails.

## **Confidentiality in email communication**

Confidentiality stands as a cornerstone of ethical conduct for authors in the publication process, particularly given the sensitive and often pre-publication nature of shared information (Privcombermuda, 2024). Authors are ethically bound to refrain from sharing reviewer comments or editorial decisions with unauthorized parties or persons or organization (**Figure 2**). This means that an author who has received detailed critiques from peer reviewers on their submitted manuscript – perhaps detailing flaws in their experimental design for a new cancer therapy – should not forward these confidential comments to colleagues who are not co-authors, or discuss them openly in public forums. These communications are privileged exchanges intended solely to facilitate the improvement and evaluation of the manuscript. Their premature disclosure during the communication could compromise the integrity of the peer review process that influence other researchers or create an unfair advantage. Similarly, editorial decisions, whether acceptance, revision, or rejection, should remain confidential between the authors and the journal until the work is officially published. Breaching this trust can undermine the fairness of the publication system and erode the confidence of editors and reviewers in the authors they engage with.



**Figure 2.** Illustration of confidentiality (Courtesy of [www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com)).

Authors also carry an ethical responsibility to protect the sensitive personal information of their co-authors or research participants that may be contained within email correspondence. This includes warranting that emails do not inadvertently expose details like contact information, personal identifiers, or private data related to individuals involved in the research. For example, when corresponding about a clinical trial for a new diabetes treatment, authors must exercise extreme caution to redact or anonymize any participant data from email attachments or even from the body of the email itself, even when communicating with co-authors. Furthermore, authors must maintain a keen awareness of and adherence to data privacy regulations, most notably the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for any data subjects located within the European Union, regardless of where the author or journal is based (Vlahou et al., 2021). For instance, GDPR mandates strict rules around the collection, storage, processing, and transfer of personal data. An author emailing a dataset to a co-author must ensure the data transfer complies with GDPR principles. This includes obtaining necessary consent, anonymizing data where possible, and using secure communication channels. Failure to comply with such regulations carries significant legal penalties. It also constitutes a serious ethical breach that compromising the privacy and trust of individuals involved in the research.

## **Authorship and contributions in email communication**

An ethical responsibility for authors revolves around accurately acknowledging contributions to a manuscript, particularly in email correspondence concerning author lists and roles (Sauermann & Haeussler, 2017). It is an absolute imperative to guarantee that all individuals listed as authors have made substantial intellectual contributions to the work (Kambhampati & Maini, 2023). This commonly refers to contributions to the conception or design, data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation, and/or drafting or critically revising the manuscript for intellectual content (Bhattacharya, 2010). Any email discussing the author list, whether an initial proposal or a suggested amendment, must reflect these criteria. For instance, if an author proposes adding a colleague, the email should clearly justify this addition by outlining the specific, substantial contributions that colleague made to the research or writing for publication. Conversely, it is unethical to include individuals as authors who do not meet these criteria—a practice known as guest authorship or gift authorship. This might occur, for example, if a department head is added to a paper solely for prestige, without genuinely contributing to the





**Figure 3.** Illustration of clear communication via email (Courtesy of [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)).

research. Similarly, it is a significant ethical breach to omit individuals who have made substantial contributions—a practice known as ghost authorship (Murray et al., 2010). This often happens when technical writers, statisticians, or junior researchers who have done significant work are not acknowledged. Email communication should proactively address and rectify any instances of guest or ghost authorship. This ensures that the final author list is a truthful representation of intellectual effort.

Continuous along with clear communication and agreement among all co-authors regarding the manuscript's status and any changes are paramount and often managed through email (**Figure 3**). From the moment a manuscript is conceptualized, discussions via email should establish clear roles, responsibilities, and expected contributions from each team member. As the manuscript progresses through drafting,

revisions, and particularly during the peer review process, the corresponding author has a critical ethical duty to keep all co-authors informed about every significant development. This includes promptly forwarding reviewer comments, sharing editorial decisions, and circulating revised versions of the manuscript for collective review and approval. Before resubmission, an email confirmation from all authors, explicitly stating their agreement with the changes made and the final version, is an ethical best practice. This confirms that every author is aware of and accountable for the content. It prevents situations where an author might later disavow responsibility for specific sections or findings. Finally, effective and transparent email communication process among co-authors thus underpins the collective integrity of the research stages and its dissemination.

### ***Avoiding misconduct via email***

A paramount ethical responsibility for authors in the publication process, particularly crucial in the high-stakes realm of health innovation research, is the absolute avoidance of misconduct in all email communications. This starts with preventing duplicate submissions or redundant publications. Authors must never email a manuscript reporting on a novel diagnostic method or a new drug candidate to multiple journals simultaneously. This wastes valuable editorial and peer review resources and inflates the scientific record. Such practices, often revealed through email trails during investigations, undermine the integrity of the scientific literature. Furthermore, authors must refrain from peer review manipulation which can be exposed through email. This includes practices like suggesting fake or biased reviewers (e.g., emailing the editor a list of fabricated email addresses for "independent" experts, or recommending friends or colleagues with whom they have undisclosed conflicts of interest). Such deceptive email-based suggestions can compromise the impartiality of the review process, especially critical when evaluating sensitive health innovation research where unbiased assessment is paramount. Any email communication from authors, whether containing raw data, statistical analyses, or results, must be free from fabricated or falsified data. Presenting manipulated images of cell cultures for a new gene therapy that altering patient outcomes, or fabricating survey responses for a public health intervention are severe forms of misconduct. These actions can be traced through digital records. They have devastating consequences for patient safety and public trust in health research.

### **Challenges and future considerations**

As explained in paragraphs above, the development of digital communication presents several ethical challenges for email correspondence in academic publishing, particularly within the health innovation research (**Figure 4**). One significant area is the increasing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in generating email content, such as drafts for authors or summaries for editors (Kobeissi et al., 2024). Though AI tools can improve efficiency by helping authors structure arguments or refine language in emails to editors, their ethical implications to the communication process are profound in publication process (Hohenstein et al., 2023). For instance, if an author uses an AI tool to draft a response to complex reviewer comments on a new AI-driven diagnostic algorithm, the AI might inadvertently misrepresent the research or even introduce biased language if its training data was skewed. Similarly, editors using AI to summarize lengthy email chains regarding a disputed

clinical trial finding risk losing critical context or subtle ethical flags embedded in the original human-generated text. The core ethical dilemma here is the potential for AI to obscure authorship, introduce unintentional bias, or even facilitate plagiarism if not used transparently and with rigorous human oversight. The "black box" nature of some AI algorithms further complicates accountability. This makes it challenging to trace the origin of misleading or incorrect information in email communications related to sensitive health data.

Compounding these technological advancements are pervasive cybersecurity threats, such as phishing and hacking, and data breaches (Seh et al., 2020). These threats directly imperil the integrity of email communication in health innovation publishing. Given the highly sensitive nature of unpublished health data, clinical trial results, and patient information often exchanged via email, the stakes for data security are incredibly high. A successful phishing attack on a journal editor could lead to the unauthorized release of confidential information about a cancer treatment before its public announcement. This could potentially impact stock markets or undermine intellectual property. Hacking into a reviewer's email account could expose confidential peer review reports that leading to reputational damage and issues in double-blind review process. The consequences of such breaches are not limited to financial or reputational harm; they can directly compromise patient privacy and even the validity of research findings if sensitive data is tampered with.

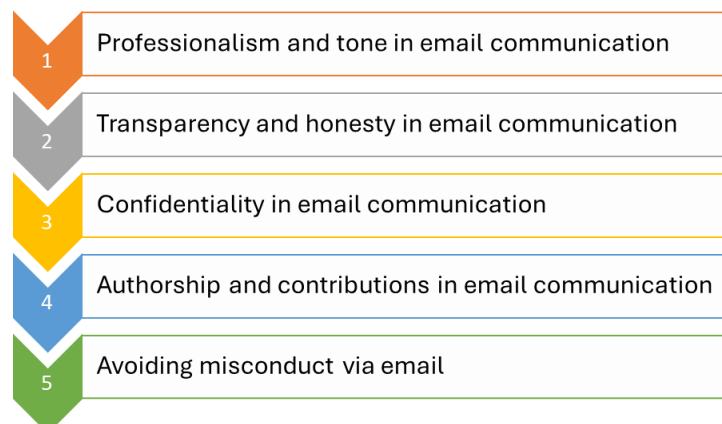
Moreover, global variations in ethical norms and communication styles pose subtle yet significant challenges. What might be considered a standard pre-submission inquiry in one cultural context might be seen as unduly aggressive or informal in another. This underscores the importance of clear and consistent email policies across journals and publishers. Establishing standardized guidelines for email ethics are crucial to mitigate these risks and maintain a secure, transparent, and ethically sound medium for advancing health innovation. Establishing clear guidelines for email ethics, journals and publishers can promote a culture of transparency, accountability, and respect among authors, editors, and reviewers. To promote best practices in email communication, stakeholders in health innovation publication can take several steps. Firstly, journals and publishers should establish clear guidelines for email communication, including expectations for tone, content, and confidentiality. Secondly, authors, editors, and reviewers should be mindful of potential conflicts of interest and take steps to avoid them. Finally, training and education programs can be implemented to promote awareness of email ethics and best practices in communication. Prioritizing email ethics can improve enhance the credibility and reliability of published research in health innovation and contribute to advancing the field.

## Conclusion

Ethical email communication serves as the fundamental cornerstone of integrity within the complex world of academic publishing. It is through these digital interactions that the very fabric of scholarly trust is woven, ensuring the fair, transparent, and efficient dissemination of knowledge, from groundbreaking health innovations to critical social science insights. Maintaining this integrity is not merely the burden of a single author, editor, or reviewer, but rather a collective responsibility shared by all stakeholders. Every individual involved in the publication process—from the researcher drafting their first submission to the seasoned editor making final decisions, and the diligent reviewer providing critical feedback—must commit to upholding principles of honesty, confidentiality, and respect in their email exchanges. Furthermore, as technology continues to evolve, bringing new tools like AI and new threats like sophisticated cyberattacks, there is an ongoing imperative for continuous learning and adaptation to evolving communication landscapes. Embracing best practices can maintain that email remains a powerful and trustworthy medium for advancing scholarship and contributing meaningfully to global knowledge.

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**Figure 4.** Ethical consideration of email ethics for authors (Generated by author).

#### AI statements

The authors assert that AI was not employed in the generation of the writing or ideas during the development of this editorial manuscript.

#### Availability of data and materials

None.

#### Competing interests

None.

#### Editor's declaration

This editorial article provides an educational effort to researchers that email ethics is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal interaction in the context of the publication process in scientific journals.

#### Ethical clearance

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#### Publishers and journal's note

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## Editor's perspective

### Innovation points

- Every email sent during the publication process, whether to editors, reviewers, or co-authors, reflects on your professionalism.
- Confidentiality is crucial in publishing; therefore, avoid sharing sensitive research, reviewer comments, or editorial decisions via email with unauthorized individuals.
- All communication related to the publication process, from initial submission to post-publication correspondence, must be truthful and transparent.

### Potential areas of interest

- How can authors and editors warrant that email communications regarding sensitive reviewer comments are handled for minimizing the misinterpretation or personal offense?
- What ethical responsibilities do corresponding authors have with email communications related to manuscript revisions, resubmissions, and editorial decisions?
- What best practices should journals implement to prevent phishing attempts or fraudulent email communications that could compromise the integrity and security of the publication process?

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