

1 *Editorial*

2

3 **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Self-Plagiarism:**

4 **How to Avoid Recycling Fraud**

5

6 Robert P. Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH,<sup>1,2</sup> Marcus A. Banks, MLIS<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey I. Ellis,

7 MD<sup>4</sup>

8

9 **Author Affiliations:**

10 <sup>1</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Denver, CO

11 <sup>2</sup>Department of Dermatology, University of Colorado at Denver and Health

12 Sciences Center, Denver, CO

13 <sup>3</sup>New York University School of Medicine, Ehrman Medical Library, New York,

14 NY

15 <sup>4</sup>Department of Dermatology, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY

16 **Corresponding Author**

17 Robert Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH

18 Department of Dermatology

19 University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center

20 P.O. Box 6510

21 Mail Stop F703

22 Aurora, CO 80045-0510

23 TEL 303-399-8020 x2479

1 FAX 303-315-8272

2 E-mail: [robert.dellavalle@uchsc.edu](mailto:robert.dellavalle@uchsc.edu).

3 [Text word count =310; references=7]

4 Funding source: none

5 Disclosed interests: Dr. Ellis is President of the post publication peer review

6 resource [www.JournalReview.org](http://www.JournalReview.org). Dr. Dellavalle and Mr. Banks are respectively

7 chair and member of the advisory committee to [www.JournalReview.org](http://www.JournalReview.org).

1 1. What is self-plagiarism?

2

3 Self-plagiarism, also known as recycling fraud, occurs when an author reuses  
4 text in subsequent writings without attributing the previous publication.<sup>1-3</sup>

5

6 2. Is self-plagiarism ever acceptable?

7

8 Thomas Jefferson repeated prose from previous writings in The Declaration of  
9 Independence and did not cite these works.<sup>4</sup> Few would argue this famous  
10 example of self-plagiarism as unacceptable.

11 Most also agree that experts providing opinions to popular newspapers or  
12 magazines need not cite specific previous writings.

13

14 4. What is copyright, and how does self-plagiarism involve copyright  
15 infringement?

16

17 The US Constitution grants Congress the power to “promote the progress of  
18 Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors  
19 the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” Copyright is this  
20 legal protection of a particular expression of an idea, but not of the facts or ideas  
21 themselves.<sup>5</sup> In the US, copyright protection extends for the life of the author  
22 plus 70 years.<sup>6</sup>

1 Authors of technical articles are often asked to assign copyright to a  
2 journal's publisher as a condition for publication—such is the case for this journal  
3 (the JAAD) and its publisher (Elsevier). Subsequent republication by the author  
4 of copyrighted text without citation is technically illegal.

5

6 5. Have authors been legally sanctioned for violating copyright on their own  
7 words?

8

9 Few sanctions have been handed down as the courts have generally recognized  
10 that “authors have special rights to their words notwithstanding copyright.”<sup>3</sup>

11

12 6. If copyright law has not been enforced against authors repeating themselves,  
13 then why worry about self-plagiarism?

14

15 Self-plagiarism is not acceptable in academic writing because academic writing is  
16 grounded by its references, and authors are expected to cite their closely related  
17 previous writing.

18 As post publication peer review and software developments make self-  
19 plagiarism ever easier to detect,<sup>7</sup> the JAAD urges all authors to promote  
20 transparency with full citation of text repeated from older publications.

1 REFERENCES

- 2 1. Hexham I. Academic Plagiarism Defined. 2005. Available at:  
3 <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~hexham/study/plag.html>. Accessed 5/2/07.
- 4 2. Samuelson P. Self-plagiarism or fair use? Communications of the ACM  
5 1994;27;8. Available at:  
6 [http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=179731&coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=](http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=179731&coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=21494517&CFTOKEN=89235197)  
7 [21494517&CFTOKEN=89235197](http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=179731&coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=21494517&CFTOKEN=89235197). Accessed 5/2/07.
- 8 3. Scanlon PM. Song from myself: an anatomy of self-plagiarism. Plagiary:  
9 Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification,  
10 2007;2;1-10. [temporary pagination for advance online copies of articles].  
11 Available at: <http://www.plagiary.org/2007/song-from-myself.pdf>. Accessed  
12 5/2/07.
- 13 4. Ellis JJ. American sphinx: The character of Thomas Jefferson. 1998;64.  
14 New York: Vintage Books.
- 15 5. Copyright Law of the United States of America and Related Laws  
16 Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code. Available at:  
17 <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/circ92.pdf>. Accessed 5/6/07.
- 18 6. Hirtle PB. Copyright Term and the Public Domain in the United States.  
19 Available at:  
20 [http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/training/Hirtle\\_Public\\_Domain.htm](http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/training/Hirtle_Public_Domain.htm).  
21 Accessed 5/6/07.
- 22 7. iParadigms LLC. IThenticate-Plagiarism Detection. Available at:  
23 <http://www.ithenticate.com/static/products.html>. Accessed 5/6/07.

