

## **STM Response to NISO RP-8-202x**

### **NISO Journal Article Version (JAV) Recommended Practice**

7 July 2024

#### **Main feedback**

The main changes for this updated Recommended Practice are (i) the introduction of semantic versioning; and (ii) a revision of terminology to simplify, clarify, and better align with current practices and the nomenclature that has emerged in the scholarly communications community.

In general, STM is supportive of these areas of change and appreciates the work that the WG has undertaken to implement these changes in this updated RP. We also support the approach that the specific assessment of what constitutes a “minor” contra “major” should not be codified here but left to the discretion of people with editorial responsibilities.

That said, STM does have a number of concerns and suggestions for improvement. Firstly, a conceptual point that pertains to the ‘Pre-acceptance’ stage: There appear to be conflicting views on ownership & control throughout this stage. Specifically:

- Section 1.2 (page 1) states that article remains “*under author control*” throughout the ‘Pre-acceptance’ stage; whereas
- Section 2.3.2 (page 4) states that a submitted manuscript under formal review – which, by definition, is also in the ‘pre-acceptance’ stage - is “*managed by a recognized publishing entity*”.

Relatedly:

- Section 2.3.1 (page 4) states that the Author’s Original (AO) applies “*before and during the peer review process*”; which appears to be at odds with:
- Section 2.3.2 (page 4) defines the Submitted Manuscript (SM) stage as “*Any version of a journal article that is under formal review managed by a recognized publishing entity*”.

To reconcile these points of tension, we recommend tightening the definitions to reduce overlap and ambiguity, specifically (i) clarifying that the AO phase stops at the point of submission, i.e. before peer-review, where the article graduates to the SM phase; and (ii) stating clearly and unambiguously that it is the publishing entity that is responsible for the article during the peer-review process.

A further conceptual point relates to the scope of the RP. In particular, in several places it is unclear exactly what types of documents are expected to be subject to the RP’s nomenclature, which could lead to confusion. We would recommend further clarity in Section 2.1 regarding the scope of the term “article” to include only works intended to be formally published by an entity independent of the author and subject to some form of peer-review. The WG might also consider where works should be intended for publication in a “journal,” which could also be defined in line with definitions from NIH (<https://sharing.nih.gov/faqs#/public-access-policy?anchor=53679>) or other entities. See also comments on 2.2.3 and 2.3.5 below.

Other substantive feedback:

- Page v, foreword: “*Readers need to know what has been peer reviewed*”: In addition to knowing if the work has been peer-reviewed, it is important that the reader knows if they are looking at the most recent, authoritative version. We suggest broadening the

language to include this aspect, for example by alluding to the concept of ‘trustworthiness’.

- Page 1, section 1.1: “... for many publishers, the concept of a “version of record” no longer applies or can apply to more than one instance of an article.”: We find the statement “the version of record no longer applies” too strong and potentially misleading. We, of course, recognize that modern publishing practices mean that the concept of a VOR as a ‘single static output that lives on a library shelf’ no longer holds true, and that the concept of a VOR has evolved - but such semantic evolution is not to say that the notion of a VOR is ‘no longer applicable’. On the contrary, the notion of a VOR remains essential for trusted and transparent scholarly communications.
- Page 2, section 1.3: “while still other stages are usually private but may be made public at the author’s discretion (such as Author’s Original and Accepted Manuscript)”: We propose to add verbiage to clarify that this act is subject to publisher’s permission (which is usually the case but may not be universally true): “..while still other stages are usually private but may be made public at the author’s discretion, if the author’s agreement with his or her publisher so allows (such as Author’s Original and Accepted Manuscript).”
- Page 3, section 2.2.2 (also relevant for 2.2.1): “Definition: Any copy of an article that has been formally accepted or endorsed by a named entity and/or individuals”: This is a very wide definition of what it means for an article to be accepted; specifically, a ‘named individual’ could literally be anyone. We recommend adding qualifying language to narrow down this definition. As a start, wording from 2.3.2 (“by a recognized publishing entity”) could be re-used but we recommend adding further qualifying language that speak to the role and responsibilities of a recognized publishing entity.
  - Note that any changes will apply to 2.2.1 as well.
- Page 4, section 2.2.3: The stage “Formally Published Article” includes both peer-reviewed articles as well as articles that, in the case of post-publication peer review models, are expected to undergo peer-review in the future. Given the centrality of peer-review in assuring that research outputs can be trusted, we are concerned with treating these two situations on equal footing and suggest to consider introducing some formal distinction, in terminology or otherwise, between a “Formally Published Article” that has / has not been peer-reviewed.
- Page 5, section 2.3.3: “an author’s Microsoft Word file”: We suggest changing this to “a submitted Microsoft Word file” to avoid confusion, given that the work is now beyond the ‘AO’ stage.
  - Additionally, we recommend to avoid referring to a particular commercial product. For example, the term “source manuscript” could be used instead.
- Page 5, section 2.3.3: “This stage is also called the author’s manuscript by the National Institutes of Health...”: While this may have been the case historically, NIH now refer to it as “Final Peer-Reviewed Manuscript”.
- Page 5, section 2.3.3: “Elsevier refers to this stage as the author’s accepted manuscript”: Similarly, this is outdated terminology and Elsevier now refer to this as “Accepted Manuscript.”
- Page 6, section 2.3.5: “A fixed article that has been made available by any organization that acts as a publisher by formally and exclusively declaring the article published.”: We suggest reiterating “and is responsible for the article endorsement and ongoing maintenance and preservation of the article”, as you say in section 2.3.3., to call out the

responsibilities that come with the role of a publisher. Further, we recommend that this section reiterate that an article is not just any scholarly work, but one that is reviewed independently of the author and/or intended for publication in a journal.

- Page 8, section 3.3: *“When a reference or citation is being made, it should include the actual stage and semantic version in addition to the title details such as DOI, title, authors, and journal.”*: While we understand the rationale for this recommendation, it does bring a risk of very complex and practically illegible reference lists. We suggest considering this point and perhaps include examples that may address this concern.
- Page 8, section 3.3: Your recommendation is that retractions should receive a major version change. An alternative would be to define a new stage or a dedicated version indicator for retracted works. We could see arguments for any of those options, and suggest that a motivation for this particular choice would be helpful.
- Page 9, section 4.2: *“A preprint may have undergone open or community-based peer review before submission”* – we suggest that the RP clarify that this is not the same, and not equivalent to, formal peer-review through an academic journal.
- Page 21, Appendix F: We propose to clarify that the selected use case examples represent straightforward examples of joint authorship and call out explicitly that joint authorship poses many complexities which are, intentionally, not covered by this RP. As a suggestion, this clarification could be readily included by adding a footnote after *“These use cases represent situations that are commonly encountered by authors, publishing organizations, and repositories”* with the footnote stating: *“Note, in particular, that the examples presented here represent straightforward situations in terms of joint authorship, but joint authorship also presents many complexities, for example with respect to copyright and with respect to funding, not elaborated on here.”*

## **Other points**

In addition to the more substantive points above, we would like to offer some further suggestions for improvement:

- Throughout the document, there appear to be inconsistencies in the capitalization in “version of record” contra “Version of Record”. We recommend that the RP use “Version of Record” throughout.
- Page v, foreword: *“Recommend how identifiers should be assigned to each version and how to ensure indexers collect citations to each version as a whole while the versions remain able to be cited independently”* – as stated, there does not seem to be tension between the unit whose citations ‘add up’ and the unit that needs to be referenced independently. Was this meant to say *“collect citations to the article as a whole while versions remain able to be cited independently”*?
- Page 1, section 1.2: *“An articles in this stage are”*: Grammar issue. For consistency with bullet point above, we suggest the singular.
- Page 5, section 2.3.4: This provides a helpful description of the term ‘galley proofs’. However, as the term has been used before, we recommend bringing the description forward to the first place where this term appears.
- Page 7, section 2.5: *“At each stage of an article’s life cycle, there may be a different party that has responsibility for the article.”* Is that correct? We would think that, once the article hits the ‘AM’ phase, it would typically remain under the responsibility of the same party. We suggest to consider this point and clarify.

- Page 12, section C.2: “*Each citable version of a work may receive a unique, new DOI, assuming the new version of the work has not overwritten*”:
  - We suggest to add ‘fixed’ so that the statement becomes “Each citable, fixed version ...”
  - “...*assuming the new version of the work has not overwritten (or made otherwise unavailable) a previous version*”: We wonder how in practice a new version would overwrite or make unavailable an older version? And, where that happens, care should be taken to avoid pointing readers to outdated versions and/or splitting citations across different versions of the same scholarly work. One or more examples to clarify might be helpful.