Conflicts of Interest: A Guide for Referees

Before accepting an invitation to review a paper for the Journal of Experimental Botany, please consider carefully whether a conflict of interest (also known as a competing interest) might arise from your doing so, and declare any such conflicts to the editorial office.

Conflicts of Interest exist when there is a divergence between an individual’s private interests (competing interests) and his or her responsibilities to scientific and publishing activities such that a reasonable observer might wonder if the individual’s behaviour or judgment was motivated by considerations of his or her competing interests.

World Association of Medical Editors

We have compiled the following list of examples to use as a guide if you are faced with what you think might be a conflict of interest. It is by no means comprehensive, so please contact us if you feel there are reasons that may prevent you from being able to provide a fair assessment of the manuscript before you. Please note that an instance of conflict of interest may not always simply be a case of whether or not you can be objective about a piece of work. You may also wish to avoid being placed in the position of giving the impression to a reasonable observer that your relationship with an author may have affected your judgment.

**Personal relationships** may create a conflict of interest if you have—

- Published or collaborated with an author within the last two years.
- Been a postdoctoral student of, or postdoctoral advisor to, an author within the last five years.
- Been a PhD student of, or PhD supervisor to, an author within the last five years.
- A close friendship, business or professional partnership, family relationship, or if you are co-habiting with or married to an author.

**Professional circumstances or intellectual opinions** may create a conflict of interest if—

- You are directly competing over publications or research funding with an author.
- You hold very strong opinions on the work presented or research conducted by an author that may prevent you from providing a fair and balanced review.

**Financial interests or institutional affiliations** may create a conflict if, for example—

- You receive funding from an organisation or body that stands to lose or gain financially through publication of a paper.
- You own or have a stake in a company or product that stands to lose or gain financially through publication of a paper.
- You are a member of an institution, organisation or society that stands to lose or gain through publication of a paper. (With this in mind, you may prefer not to review a manuscript from your own department.)