

*The following is copyrighted by Wes Snyder, 2003  
Used with permission*

Once upon a time, I wrote a book.

It was the first engineering textbook in robotics. It took me four years to write. Writing a book was not one of my job responsibilities. I received no reduction in work requirements, no time off, to write this book. I did it all at night, on weekends, on days which otherwise would be for leisure. The only compensation I received for this work was the royalties from the publisher. (incidentally, when all was said and done, the royalties in, and the taxes paid, I estimate I made about \$0.50 per hour).

My book was translated into English (that is, it was published in the UK) and into German. Imaging how pleased I was to learn a year or so later, that it had been published in another country, a large country, with many universities and many engineers. I have a copy of that translation. It's pretty impressive, written as it was, in the script of that country. I am sure you have guessed by now that this particular copy was made and distributed without paying any royalties at all.

It was even more interesting when I received a request by email from a professor in that country, asking if I would please send a copy of the answer book. Some people do indeed have a lot of nerve, or a deficit of understanding.

People like me work very hard to create, to write, to publish; and people deserve to be compensated for their work. That is what "copyright" means. If you use someone's work without paying the copyright, you are stealing, plain and simple. Whether you can get away with it or not is irrelevant. It is still theft, and it is still unethical.

But what about other ethical questions concerning publishing? Things not quite as simple a copying a textbook without paying. Below, I will state and answer some of the more common questions concerning the ethics of publication. And yes, I AM an expert on the topic (by my own definition).

**Should I acknowledge my sponsor in a publication?**

Unless, for some special reason, your sponsor does not want their support acknowledged, your paper should include an acknowledgement, usually including the program and grant number.

**Can I publish the same paper in two different places, for example in an electrical engineering conference and a mechanical engineering conference?** Yes you can, provided that in whichever is published second, you state something like "this is a copy of a paper originally published in the International Conference on Eggplant Engineering". And, provided the editor of the second publication is aware of this and approves it.

**Can I submit a paper to two journals at once?**

Normally no, this is considered an ethical violation, if for no other reason than the amount of

work you are putting reviewers to. I recently heard of a reviewer who received the same paper to review simultaneously from four journals. It was declined by all. An exception could be made if both editors are made aware of the situation and approve (which they will not do).

**I have published a paper in a conference and now wish to publish the same paper in a journal. Is it ethical to do so?** Yes it is, if you or the editor provide a statement like the one in the previous question. Sometimes, journals have special issues which are collections of the best papers from specific conferences. In that case, the editor of the special issue takes care of the statement for you. Generally however, it is better to enhance the paper before producing the journal version— see next question.

**I have published a paper in a conference and now wish to publish an enhanced paper on the same material in a journal. What should I do?** You can certainly publish extensions/enhancements of conference papers in journals. In fact, this is strongly encouraged. To be proper about it, you should state something like “This paper is an extension of work originally reported in the International Conference on Eggplant Engineering”. Furthermore, the extension must be nontrivial.

**What can I quote in a paper without citation?**

Nothing.

**What about figures? If I use a figure which is trivially simple, can I simply photocopy it from another paper and use it without citation?** If it is genuinely generic e.g. a block diagram of a PID controller, you have two choices: you can redraw it or photocopy it. If you copy, you MUST gain permission. If you redraw it, no citation is necessary.

**What about using my own previously-published work?** That depends on where the work was previously published, and who the copyright holder is. If you simply copy some segment of work you previously did, you should state where it is copied from. For instance, “in our earlier work published in the Journal of Unverifiable Experiments, we said ‘Cold Fusion is Hot’” [Snyder, 98]. For more extensive quotes, over a page, or a figure, you should gain permission of the copyright holder. The IEEE policy on this topic states that an author may use his/her work again, provided it is cited.

**What about publications by authors who work for the US federal government?** In general, such publications may not be copyrighted, and you may copy, for example, a figure from such a publication without requesting permission. However, you still need to say “from the IEEE Transactions on Eggplant Engineering,” — you just don’t have to add “used with permission.” Any time government employees publish a paper, they are supposed to include a disclaimer which says that copyrights are not owned by the publisher. Some other governments may have similar policies -- I have not been able to sample every country, however, my colleagues from Europe and Japan tell me that the US seems to be unique in this aspect. In most other countries at least, copyrights are owned by the publication and/or the author, and not by the government.

**What about web publications?**

The problem with web publications is that the authors usually do not identify whether or not the

publication is copyrighted or not. The author may have taken a figure from his/her publication in a journal (which is copyrighted) and put it on the web page. You should make every effort to track down the actual copyright holder. It is not always easy to do that (I once encountered a case where the copyright holder had died, and I had to contact the family), but you need to try very hard.

**And what happens if I don't follow these guidelines?**

My definition of an unethical act is one which results in, or potentially results in hurting someone else. If you don't follow these guidelines, first of all you are hurting someone else, and that's what is really important. But here's an interesting (more-or-less true) story that carries consequences a bit further.

Graduate student Y, working for professor X, developed a grand idea and wrote a paper about it for submission to the IEEE Transactions on Eggplant Engineering. The paper, with both names as authors, was accepted and the paper published. Immediately after publication, the editor of Trans. EE received a letter pointing out that the entire paper had been copied from another publication. The Transactions withdrew the electronic version of the paper from its web page and replaced it with a page stating the paper by X and Y had been removed from the IEEE archive because it was plagiarized. The Transactions also published an apology to its readership in the next issue. The professor, who was innocent of plagiarism (but not of bad judgement) suffered a serious career blow. We won't go into what happened to the graduate student.