

MANUSCRIPTROUTE STANDARD

Reference Integrity & DOI Verification Standard

How ManuscriptRoute checks references, handles uncertainty and protects authors from fabricated or misleading citation records.

Core principle: What cannot be verified is not presented as fact. What ManuscriptRoute controls is documented, traceable and accountable.

1. Why reference integrity matters

A reference list is not a decorative part of a manuscript. It is part of the evidence trail that allows editors, reviewers and readers to test where statements came from. A polished manuscript can still be seriously compromised when citations are fabricated, mismatched, obsolete, duplicated or impossible to trace.

ManuscriptRoute therefore treats reference checking as an integrity workflow, not simply a formatting service.

Common reference risks

- DOI points to a different article
- Title and author metadata do not match
- Journal or year information is inconsistent
- Citation exists only in secondary websites
- AI-generated or fabricated-looking references
- Duplicate records with different formatting

Our standard

- Traceability before formatting
- Verified / needs confirmation / unverifiable status
- Author review for uncertain records
- No silent invention of missing metadata
- Replacement only with legitimate sources
- Reference list and in-text reconciliation

2. What we verify

- DOI or other persistent identifier where one exists.
- Article or book title against traceable scholarly or publisher records.
- Author names, journal or publisher, year, volume, issue and page/article number consistency.
- Whether an in-text citation has a corresponding reference-list entry and vice versa.
- Whether duplicate records or suspiciously similar citations appear in the manuscript.
- Whether a claimed source can be located through a sufficiently reliable record before it is labeled verified.

Reference Integrity Guarantee

ManuscriptRoute does not knowingly present an unverifiable reference as verified. When a record cannot be confirmed, it is flagged for author action rather than normalized into a plausible-looking citation.

3. Verification status model

- **VERIFIED** - the citation can be matched consistently to a traceable scholarly or publisher record.
- **NEEDS AUTHOR CONFIRMATION** - some metadata is incomplete, conflicting or context-dependent and requires author evidence or clarification.
- **UNVERIFIABLE** - the citation cannot be traced reliably enough to present as a confirmed scholarly source.

- REPLACEMENT CANDIDATE - a legitimate alternative source may be suggested when it genuinely supports the author's claim; the author remains responsible for confirming suitability.

4. What we do not do

ManuscriptRoute does not create fictitious articles, fake DOI records, invented publication metadata or false quotations. We also do not replace a weak or missing source merely because another paper looks superficially similar. Source substitution must preserve the factual meaning of the author's claim.

5. Author responsibilities

- Confirm that cited sources were genuinely used or are appropriate to the scientific claim.
- Provide inaccessible or unpublished material when it is essential to the manuscript.
- Approve any reference replacement that changes the supporting literature.
- Disclose source limitations or non-standard materials when required by the target journal.

6. How this fits the publication workflow

Reference integrity is checked before the manuscript is presented as submission-ready. On complete Publication Routes, the verified reference set is then carried into journal formatting, cover-letter preparation, submission packaging, reviewer-response work and retargeting. This reduces the risk that a citation problem reappears at every new journal.

For editors and reviewers

The objective is not to make a reference list look perfect. The objective is to make it defensible. If a citation cannot be defended, it should be flagged before submission.

7. Technical checking sequence

- Normalize the citation sufficiently to identify the claimed source without altering its meaning.
- Search for a traceable record using the most distinctive metadata available: DOI, title, author combination, journal and year.
- Compare the claimed citation with publisher or scholarly metadata and identify conflicts.
- Classify the record as verified, needs author confirmation, unverifiable or replacement candidate.
- Reconcile the final reference list with in-text citations after corrections are approved.
- Carry the approved reference set into target-journal formatting rather than rebuilding it from an unverified copy.

8. Why this matters during journal submission

Reference-integrity problems can create more than a cosmetic correction. They can weaken the credibility of the introduction and discussion, make reviewers question the literature search, create delays during technical checks and complicate a response to reviewers if a cited source cannot be produced.

A verified reference workflow also becomes more valuable after rejection. When a paper is retargeted, the same defensible literature base can be reformatted for a new journal without reintroducing questionable records.

9. Author pre-submission reference checklist

- Every in-text citation has a matching reference-list record.
- Every reference-list record is cited in the manuscript unless the journal permits otherwise.
- DOIs and URLs point to the intended source.

- Retracted or corrected literature has been handled appropriately.
- Unpublished, preprint, dataset or conference sources are identified accurately.
- No citation was added merely because an automated tool produced it.
- Any unverifiable record has been removed, replaced legitimately or explicitly resolved with author evidence.

Publication-readiness rule

A manuscript should not be called reference-ready merely because the citations follow the correct style. Verification status and traceability come first; formatting comes second.

10. Examples of issues that must be escalated to the author

- A DOI resolves, but to an article with a different title or author list than the manuscript claims.
- The cited title can be found only on an unverified secondary webpage and not in a traceable scholarly record.
- A reference appears to combine the title of one article with the DOI of another.
- A source is real, but it does not support the claim for which it is cited.
- A journal name, publication year or volume appears inconsistent across available records.
- The reference is an unpublished internal source that only the author can document.

11. What a reference-verification report should tell the author

A useful verification report should not merely say that a reference list was “checked.” It should make uncertainty visible. Authors should be able to identify which records were confirmed, which need clarification, which were removed or replaced and which changes require their approval.

This makes reference verification auditable and prevents a corrected-looking bibliography from hiding unresolved source problems.

12. Final integrity statement

ManuscriptRoute’s reference standard is designed to protect the author’s credibility and the manuscript’s evidence trail. The safest citation is not the citation that looks the most polished; it is the citation that can be traced, defended and used honestly in the scientific argument.