

Reader Poll

Researchers who agree to editors' demands to add citations to their papers are more likely to get their work published. We asked readers how they feel about 'citation padding'. The majority say that scientists shouldn't engage in any kind of citation manipulation. But almost 40% of readers think that it's fine to add a reference occasionally, as long as it's relevant to the paper.

Most readers say there should be stricter rules to stop editors from coercing authors into adding unnecessary references — and to stop publishers from supporting the practice. “I was particularly shocked when a couple of journals I was reviewing manuscripts for asked me to encourage the authors to pick citations from that journal, when possible,” recalls neurobiologist Jihane Homman-Ludiye. Citations added by the editor should be identified as such and accompanied by an explanation of why they were required, suggests pathologist Charles Platz.

Others point out that asking for more citations isn't always manipulation: there's a fine line between unethical padding and necessary editorial work. “I think too many authors only cite papers that support their views, and not enough editors and reviewers demand that they assess all sides of a hypothesis,” adds scientific curator Christina James-Zorn.