



Scholars Should Report Documented Due Diligence of Literature Searches in Their Research Problem Domain^{*}

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Abstract

Throughout the 20th century, searching, citing, discussing, and referencing the published literature was required for all members of scholarly communities devoted to solving real-world problems. This practice clarified what new knowledge an author contributed and its relation to what experts already knew. Visionaries hoped that information technology would allow scholars to access literature easily from around the world. Even though every researcher now has access to such search tools, the modern publish-or-perish mentality pressures authors to produce reports without using them. This environment created incentives for fabrication, plagiarism, and dismissive or ghosting literature reviews. These breaches of publishing ethics not only obtain unearned credit for fraudulent authors, but also obfuscate the work of authentic scholars.

To counter the perverse incentives to ignore, disregard, or plagiarize prior work, new counter-incentives and requirements for scholarly integrity are necessary. While nonprofit Brain Health Alliance cannot impose these requirements on the rest of the academic world, we will implement them at our own journals. Recording the literature search process has long been a defining feature of systematic literature reviews, but it should also improve the transparency of any kind of scholarly communication. In particular, requiring the authors of research articles to document the search conducted and the results found will help peer reviewers and editors to hold authors accountable for dismissive and ghosting literature reviews. For this reason, Brainiacs Journal will require authors to report the literature searches performed before and during preparation of a manuscript. The Editorial Board will require reviewers to be experts already familiar with the published literature in the field, or otherwise, to repeat the authors' literature searches and compare their results to those reported in the manuscript under review.

Literature searches should be reproducible, meaning that reviewers can submit the same queries as submitted by authors to the same search engines and obtain the same results from libraries with open access unrestricted by black-box algorithms. To facilitate this requirement, we will extend the FAIR Metrics module of the DREAM Ontology with classes and properties useful for recording literature searches. Publishing peer reviews, including recorded literature searches, in both human-readable and semantic reasoning engine-readable formats will enable the wider scholarly community to judge whether authors and reviewers have completed their due diligence.

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Keyphrases

Research integrity, reproducible scholarship, due diligence, literature search, provenance tracing, FAIR Metrics.

Contents

Documented Due Diligence	1
Reproducible Literature Search with FAIR Metrics	2
Provenance Discoverability and Tracing	2
Literature Search Semantic Records	3
Continuous Learning and Improvement	3
FAIR Credit, Attribution, and Acknowledgment	4
Citation	4
Affiliations	4
References	4

Documented Due Diligence

Research with experience and expertise in a problem domain requires familiarity, awareness, and knowledge of the historical record of published literature in that problem domain. In science, engineering, and medicine, the reproducibility, validity, reliability, and integrity of that knowledge inherently depends on its provenance (Jardine et al. 1984; C. Taswell 1992; C. Taswell 2010b). During the last century, scholarship required documenting due diligence with searches of the prior art and published literature in the relevant research problem domain. Scholars traveled to multiple physical libraries, walked through the stacks, and searched for printed books and journals on the shelves. Visionaries predicted that information technology advances would replace this physical journey with the ability to retrieve any published work on Earth with a few clicks and keystrokes on a computer (Bush et al. 1945; Engelbart et al. 1968).

According to common sense, eliminating the limits that time and distance impose on searches in physical libraries should raise, rather than lower, scholarly standards for what constitutes an acceptable literature search. However, since the beginning of the Internet Age, many

authors active in research publishing have experienced the pressure of the publish-or-perish environment, which creates “perverse incentives and hypercompetition” to move fast and make claims of novelty (Edwards et al. 2017). Some have argued that this accelerating pace of research output itself prevents researchers from thoroughly searching the literature and have proposed new search tools to better focus attention on the most relevant works (Lu 2011). Such efforts will be futile if authors lack the motivation to search at all.

The perceived need to game the metrics through quantity at the expense of quality (Biagioli et al. 2020) creates an incentive to shirk the time-consuming work of authentic scholarship in favor of fraudulent shortcuts, such as fabrication, plagiarism, and dismissive or ghosting literature reviews (A. Craig and C. Taswell 2025). Wrongful false claims of novelty are made by authors of plagiarism as well as both dismissive and ghosting literature reviews. Moreover, there exist differences between these three forms of poor quality authorship with publishing ethics violations. Regarding literature reviews, A. Craig and C. Taswell (2025) explain “the important distinction between a dismissive literature review, in which the author makes such claims due to insufficient search, and a ‘ghosting literature review’, in which the author knowingly suppresses others’ work and refuses to cite it.”

Dismissive literature reviews in particular have become dangerously common. A survey found that 321 out of 475 articles published on the website of the US National Bureau of Economic Research between the years 2000 and 2022 with a focus on education contained dismissive literature reviews (Phelps and MacArthur 2025). We can no longer assume that authors, reviewers, and editors conduct and complete their due diligence if we leave it to their discretion, now seemingly impacted by money and politics more than truth and integrity. Reestablishing standards for truth, honesty, authenticity, and integrity requires countervailing incentives (Edwards et al. 2017; A. Craig, Lee, et al. 2022) to support the tradition and practice of “standing on the shoulders of giants” in a manner consistent with the famous phrase popularized by Isaac Newton (S. K. Taswell, Trigg, et al. 2020).

The most basic due diligence for any scholar requires searching the published literature within the research problem domain (S. K. Taswell, Trigg, et al. 2020). Finding relevant knowledge in prior work then imposes the ethical obligation to cite and discuss that earlier work, and to distinguish what previous authors have already published from what novel claims the authors are contributing in the present work. However, the pressure to appear more novel leads some to avoid completing a literature search, and instead, write a dismissive literature review simply proclaiming, “To the best of our knowledge, no studies have investigated...” (Phelps 2012).

Some authors may take this dereliction of duty a step further, disregarding prior work they know exists, in which case those same words constitute a ghosting literature review (A. Craig and C. Taswell 2025). False, misleading, and/or willfully deceptive statements in these dismissive and ghosting reviews disseminate wrongful information that may dissuade other readers from searching, finding, and studying valuable earlier work (Phelps 2012; A. Craig and C. Taswell 2025), especially when those readers operate in an epistemic bubble or echo chamber that discourages them from performing their own independent due diligence with literature searches (Nguyen 2020).

Reproducible Literature Search with FAIR Metrics

Since 2014, the Brain Health Alliance Virtual Institute (BHAVI) has passed on traditions of scholarly integrity through mentoring (S. K.

Taswell, A. G. Craig, et al. 2019). However, it is not enough for young people to learn scholarship in school and mentoring programs and then abandon it when they realize powerful institutions only value the superficial appearance of progress. Peer review once kept most misinformation, dis-information, anti-information, and caco-information from entering the scholarly record, but a lack of transparency and accountability combined with pressure to work quickly and favor the well-connected can compromise its efficacy (S. K. Taswell, Trigg, et al. 2020). Peer review must evolve to meet the challenges of the Internet Age by replacing anonymity with attribution, impunity with accountability, and confidentiality with transparency to the public.

We called for this approach to scholarship previously in the form of reproducible peer review, in which a reviewer documents the sources of information and the lines of reasoning well enough that a new reviewer can find the same information and follow the same logic to arrive at the same assessment (A. Craig, Lee, et al. 2022). We advocated further for the open publication of peer reviews, in order to create an incentive for reviewers to write quality reviews that their peers will recognize and cite, as well as a disincentive to write dishonest reviews assuming that such dishonesty will not occur when exposed to public scrutiny as an open review.

Prior to our literature review and commentary on peer review for scholarship (A. Craig, Lee, et al. 2022), we introduced a specific form of accountability through reproducibility with the FAIR Metrics (A. Craig, Ambati, Dutta, Kowshik, et al. 2019), for which the self-recursive dual acronym FAIR refers to both Fair Attribution to Indexed Reports and Fair Acknowledgment of Information Records. We demonstrated use of a family of FAIR Metrics that quantify how often an article appropriately cites sources, misrepresents the content of sources, accurately presents claims as novel, or plagiarizes from prior work (A. Craig, Athreya, et al. 2023). We later extended this approach with another family of FAIR Metrics that evaluates the rigor with which reviewers document sources of information with citation of references in their peer reviews (A. Craig and C. Taswell 2024).

Provenance Discoverability and Tracing

More recently, we discussed what some authors have called *research fragmentation*, defined as the “disjointed state of knowledge production where research communities become isolated silos”, in our work on the Structure-Behavior-Action Framework (Kristanto et al. 2025; Kristanto et al. 2026). However, fragmentation does not suffice to explain the failure to cite relevant works by authors within the same community, published in the same professional organization’s conferences and journals. In other words, isolated silos and research fragmentation should not be possible within a single community in which authors should have no difficulty searching on key words and phrases for previously published work by other members of that same community.

Nevertheless, dismissive and ghosting literature reviews do occur. ASIS&T conference proceedings and journals have published multiple works by nonprofit Brain Health Alliance authors on the FAIR Metrics in the years 2018 to 2022 (A. Craig and C. Taswell 2018; A. Craig, Ambati, Dutta, Mehrotra, et al. 2019; S. K. Taswell, Trigg, et al. 2020; Anand et al. 2022), but other authors in the same ASIS&T community published their work on closely related topics (Bishop et al. 2019; Murillo 2020; Tompkins et al. 2021; Gao et al. 2022; Qin et al. 2023) in the years 2019 to 2023 without any mention of our work, despite the historical fact that our work on the PORTAL-DOORS Project (including the NPDS Framework, DREAM Principles, and FAIR Metrics) dates back

to 2006, and despite the fact that they cite the Wilkinson et al. 2016 Findable Accessible Interoperable Reusable (FAIR) Principles, which were plagiarized from the PORTAL-DOORS Project (C. Taswell 2007; C. Taswell 2010a; A. Craig, Ambati, Dutta, Kowshik, et al. 2019).

Therefore, to address this problem of dismissive and ghosting literature reviews, Brainiacs Journal will require the following:

1. Authors must document where, when, and how they searched the literature by recording their queries submitted to search engine services named and identified with versions and URLs.
2. Authors must also document their literature searches by providing data files that capture snapshots of search engine results obtained in response to those queries submitted to search engines.
3. Reviewers of manuscripts submitted by authors should evaluate the content using the FAIR Metrics.
4. Reviewers should apply their knowledge of the historical record of published literature in the research problem domain to recognize wrongful claims that are dismissive, ghosting, and/or plagiarized.
5. In those situations for which the reviewer may not be familiar as an expert in the research problem domain, reviewers must replicate the literature search reported by the authors with sufficient scrutiny to compare resources found.

While authors and reviewers will likely find differences in search results due to differences between search tools and changes in the contents of resource repositories searched, the overall state of knowledge in a research problem domain should remain consistent and reproducible. Otherwise, the omission, contradiction, or controversy should be reported explicitly. In situations where an omission of citation occurs suggestive of dismissive or ghosting claims by the authors, the Brainiacs Journal Editorial Board may determine that the omitted reference remains relevant enough to require that the authors cite and discuss it.

Literature Search Semantic Records

Documenting the general aims and specific details of the literature search protocol with methods and results has long been a defining feature of systematic comprehensive literature reviews because the search methodology can strongly influence the conclusions reached (Harari et al. 2020). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement provides a guideline for finding, evaluating, selecting, and synthesizing primary research (Page et al. 2021). However, these PRISMA guidelines do not clarify exactly which details of the literature search and results the authors should record. As we develop our own guidelines, we will consider PRISMA a reference point, but will also develop sets of standards appropriate to different kinds of publications, including literature reviews, research articles, and opinion pieces (Xu et al. 2015).

The Brainiacs Journal will transition toward requiring inclusion of a literature search report with each article submission. We will analyze different search engines, library databases, and other search resources to determine which details authors should document. We will test different approaches to documenting and replicating searches to find suitable standards of due diligence for different problem domains. We will also develop criteria for when the search results are the same, similar, related, or different (Athreya, S. K. Taswell, Mashkoor, et al. 2020). Ultimately, we plan to record and publish both authors' and reviewers'

search records using the Nexus-PORTAL-DOORS-Scribe (NPDS) Cyber-infrastructure. One of the original goals of the PORTAL-DOORS Project (PDP) has always been to track the provenance of knowledge in formats that are readable to both humans and automated agents (C. Taswell 2007). For example, we have applied the NPDS cyberinfrastructure to tracking provenance of cultural heritage artifacts (Athreya, S. K. Taswell, and C. Taswell 2021).

To facilitate recording literature searches and results in a format usable by semantic reasoning engines, we will extend the FAIR Metrics module of the DREAM Ontology. This module already features classes and properties useful for recording the comparison of claims between the scientific report or peer review under analysis and those in prior work (A. Craig and C. Taswell 2023). Semantic web technologies with these tools provide the requisite white-box transparency to prevent the known biases present in black-box machine learning tools for search finding and question answering (Reyero Lobo et al. 2023). This provably-correct semantic-reasoning approach with ontologies remains essential, because recording the steps by which one arrived at a result and correcting biases in previous attempts, whether in a biochemical assay or in a literature search, remains the foundation of the scientific method (Gauch 2002).

Continuous Learning and Improvement

From a system perspective in diverse research domains, the study of *continuous learning and improvement* attracts the attention of concerned scholars (Olsen et al. 2007; Rubin 2024; Ocepek et al. 2025). Analogous to learning from data analysis that requires measures of transparency about the data, metadata and their provenance to ensure validity and replicability (C. Taswell 2007), systemic learning from publications necessitates an audit trail for the origins and development of the ideas espoused in such publications. Ensuring that due diligence requires conducting robust literature searches, documenting the search process, and citing other authors' work foundational to the hypotheses and claims presented in a published scholarly manuscript engenders this level of transparency to support science as a process that "maintain[s] standards for maintaining standards" (C. Taswell 2025). In turn, it empowers others who aim to build upon or challenge the core arguments of such a manuscript, to ground this ongoing scientific dialogue engaging not only with the arguments of the current authors, but also with the prior work of past authors in the history of the field (Hull 1990).

As a complement to rigorous research, scholars should transform the results they publish in peer reviewed journals into something that actually touches the lives and health of real people or makes a meaningful impact in the real world (Rubin 2025). We have provided examples of advocacy, policy translation, social media content creation, social entrepreneurship, and public education as ways to turn a publication based on mere $p < 0.05$, at risk for false positives and p-hacking as a misused form of data mining (Gwise et al. 2021; Wikipedia 2026), into real innovation that truly touches lives and health. The peer reviewed publication alone is often necessary but not sufficient to do so. We discuss this point because an accurate and honest historical record contained in a publication, in the form of the diligent literature search and citation requirement we have described herein, becomes instrumental to clarifying the incremental 'delta' that transforms publication coupled with passion into real world impact. Every one of these approaches must be anchored in trust. This trust can only be built and sustained if it includes a candid disclosure of the ideas, concepts, and past scholarship of other authors (McGinnis et al. 2024).

FAIR Credit, Attribution, and Acknowledgment

Requiring authors to report explicit assertions about where, when, and for what they searched will obligate them to do the actual search or else otherwise risk making false claims about having done a search that they did not do. This requirement will eliminate moral uncertainty and ethical ambiguity, compelling the author's own conscience to serve as a first line of defense against dismissive and ghosting literature reviews. Reviewers will then serve as a second line of defense when they reproduce the search and apply their own knowledge of the literature published in the research problem domain. Publishing both authors' and reviewers' literature search reports will bring to bear a third line of defense: the larger community of stakeholders. It will expose those who shirk their due diligence to public scrutiny and will make visible and citable the often hidden but essential work that sets apart those authors who are true scholars. Modeling this practice in the Brainiacs Journal may be only one step toward shifting the incentives to require again scrupulous accumulation and reporting of knowledge. Nevertheless, it will establish an example that other organizations can emulate. Together, we can turn the tide and restore the public's trust in scholars across science, engineering, medicine, and other fields where humans work to solve the problems afflicting humans and life on planet earth.

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