



# Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Lower Saxony

## Rules for Good Research Practice

### Preamble

The Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Lower Saxony is the oldest continuously existing institution of its kind and among the most research-intensive in Germany. It oversees numerous long-term projects in fundamental humanities research and promotes interdisciplinary scientific exchange among its members. In the selection of its members and in its research activities, it is committed solely to scientific excellence. However, scientific excellence can only be achieved on the basis of absolute integrity and within the framework of good research practice. Therefore, in addition to its Statutes, the Academy has adopted the following rules, which were approved at the plenary session on 3 November 2023. The Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture was informed of this supplementary regulatory framework in December 2023. These rules are based on the “Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice” of the German Research Foundation (DFG), which came into force in 2019, and comply with its requirements.

### I. Standards of Good Research Practice

The Academy is committed to upholding the principles of good research practice and establishes the following rules, which are communicated to its members as well as to its employees. Members and employees are bound by these rules when conducting scientific work for or on behalf of the Academy.

#### 1. General Principles

- a. All researchers at the Academy bear responsibility for realising and upholding the fundamental values and standards of scientific work in their scholarly conduct. They are obliged to regularly update their knowledge of the standards of good research practice and to promote these standards at all levels and from the earliest possible stage—whether as project leaders, commission chairs, heads of working groups, or in university teaching.
- b. The principles of good research practice specifically require adherence to *lege artis* standards, meaning that work shall be conducted in accordance with the methods recognised and accepted within the relevant discipline. All findings shall be rigorously subject to critical self-examination. The promotion of constructive debate within the scientific community is to be actively fostered.

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Only the German version shall have legal effect and prevail in case of any discrepancies or inconsistencies.

c. All members of the Academy are obliged to uphold truthfulness and honesty in their scholarly publications, lectures, reviews, funding applications, job applications, and public statements, with regard both to their own contributions and those of others. The intellectual property of others shall be respected. Unpublished intellectual property of others may only be used for one's own work with their permission.

## **2. Responsibility at Leadership Levels**

a. The leadership of the Academy bears responsibility for ensuring an appropriate institutional organisational structure. It shall ensure the clear assignment of responsibilities regarding management, oversight, quality assurance, and conflict resolution, and shall communicate these appropriately to members and employees concerned. The framework conditions for scientific work include clear, written procedures and principles governing recruitment and staff development, in particular for the promotion of early career researchers, and to ensure equal opportunities with regard to gender and background ("diversity").

b. The leaders of individual research units bear responsibility for the unit as a whole. They shall organise collaboration within the unit so that it can collectively fulfil its tasks, ensure the necessary coordination and cooperation, and make certain that all members are aware of their roles, rights, and obligations. The tasks and responsibilities of all researchers as well as supporting staff involved in a research project shall be clearly defined and remain clear at every stage of the project. Should the focus of work within a research project change, the roles of those involved shall be adjusted accordingly. It is also the responsibility of the leadership to ensure the appropriate individual supervision of early career researchers and to foster the career development of research staff.

c. The leadership of the Academy, as well as of each research unit, shall take suitable organisational measures to prevent abuse of power and the exploitation of relationships of dependency.

## **3. Reviews and Selection Procedures**

Honest conduct is the foundation of a legitimate decision-making process. Researchers, as well as members of scientific advisory and decision-making bodies, are strictly bound to confidentiality, particularly when deciding on the suitability of individuals, evaluating submitted funding applications, or making recommendations on the continued funding of existing projects. Information provided to reviewers and committee members in the course of their work for the Academy shall not be disclosed to third parties or used for their own work.

Reviewers and committee members (in either an advisory or decision-making capacity) shall disclose all facts that could give rise to concerns about a conflict of interest. External reviewers who do not belong to the Academy shall likewise be obliged to maintain the confidentiality of the documents provided to them and to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

## **4. Quality Assurance in the Research Process**

The researchers of the Academy conduct every stage of the research process *lege artis*. When planning a project, researchers shall take full account of the current state of research. Identifying relevant research questions requires thorough investigation of research results that have already been made publicly available. Scientific work also requires the use of procedures designed to prevent individual (including unconscious) bias.

Whenever scientific findings are made publicly accessible (in the form of publications or through other means of communication), the quality assurance mechanisms applied shall always be disclosed. When new methods are developed, particular emphasis shall be placed on quality assurance and the establishment of standards.

If, after making research findings publicly accessible, researchers themselves notice inconsistencies or errors, or are made aware of them, they shall correct these. Should the inconsistencies or errors provide grounds for the retraction of a publication, the researchers shall act without delay to ensure that the relevant publisher or publishing infrastructure issues the correction or retraction and that this is clearly indicated accordingly.

## **5. Documentation**

Researchers shall document all information relevant to the production of a research result in a transparent manner as is required and appropriate within the relevant academic discipline, so that the result can be verified and assessed. The provenance of data, organisms, materials, and software used in the research process shall be clearly indicated, and any reuse shall be documented; original sources shall be fully cited. The nature and scope of research data generated in the research process shall be described.

Individual results that do not support the research hypotheses shall be documented as well. The selective reporting of results is not permitted in this context. Where specific disciplinary recommendations exist for the verification and assessment of results, researchers shall undertake documentation in accordance with those respective requirements. If the documentation does not meet these requirements, the limitations and the reasons for them shall be clearly explained. Documentation and research results shall not be manipulated; they shall be protected against manipulation to the greatest extent possible.

## **6. Authorship**

An author is a person who has made a genuine, verifiable contribution to the content of a scholarly publication, whether it be a text, data, or software publication. In each individual case, and taking into account the conventions of the relevant discipline, it shall be assessed whether a contribution is both genuine and verifiable.

As a rule, a verifiable and genuine contribution exists in particular where a researcher has been scientifically involved in a significant manner

- in the development and design of a research project, or
- in the preparation, collection, acquisition, or provision of data, software or sources, or
- in the analysis/evaluation or interpretation of the data or sources and the conclusions drawn from them, or
- in drafting the manuscript.

A managerial or supervisory role alone does not justify authorship. If a contribution is insufficient to warrant authorship, acknowledgement of participation may instead be given in another form, such as in footnotes, the foreword, acknowledgements, etc.

The researchers involved shall reach a mutual agreement on who is to be considered an author. Agreement on the order of authorship should be reached in good time, generally no later than when the manuscript is drafted, on the basis of transparent criteria and taking into account the conventions of the relevant discipline. All authors shall approve the final version of a joint work intended for

publication. Approval shall not be withheld without sufficient reason; refusal shall be justified with verifiable criticism relating to data, methods or results.

All authors share joint responsibility for the publication, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Authors shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that their research contributions are designated by publishers or infrastructure providers in such a way that users are able to cite them correctly. In principle, every person who has made a substantial contribution to a publication shall be named as an author. Honorary authorship is excluded.

## **7. Publication Platforms**

Authors shall select the publication platform carefully, taking into account its quality and visibility within the relevant field. Researchers who assume editorial responsibilities shall carefully consider for which publication platforms they undertake this role. The scientific quality of a contribution does not depend on the publication platform through which it is made publicly accessible. In addition to books and scholarly journals, suitable publication platforms may in particular also include: subject repositories, data and software repositories, and blogs.

## **8. Public Access to Research Results**

As a general principle, all research results shall be published. If, in individual cases, the decision is made not to publish certain results, this decision shall be justified and documented. Such a decision shall not, in principle, be dependent on third parties, unless their rights would be infringed by the publication. Wherever possible, the underlying research data, materials and information, the methods applied, and, where applicable, the software used should also be made available, and the workflows should be described in full detail.

Self-developed software should be made publicly accessible as open source, including disclosure of the source code. Own and others' prior work shall be fully and correctly cited. Excessively fragmented publications should be avoided; self-citations should be kept to a minimum.

The general public should be granted unrestricted access to research results, provided this does not infringe the rights of third parties. All research results should, wherever possible, also be published Open Access and in accordance with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-Usable).

## **9. Archiving**

Researchers shall, in an appropriate manner and in accordance with the standards of the relevant discipline, ensure the preservation of publicly accessible research data and research results, as well as the underlying key materials and, where applicable, the research software used. They shall retain these data for an appropriate period—at least ten years. The retention period shall commence from the date on which public access is granted. In case of legitimate reasons for not retaining certain data, researchers shall set these out in a transparent manner. The Academy supports the research units in this by providing suitable storage facilities for the research data to be archived.

## **10. Framework Conditions, Agreement on Rights of Use**

Researchers shall handle the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of research responsibly. They shall take into account rights and obligations, in particular those arising from statutory requirements and contractual agreements. Where necessary, they shall obtain and present approvals and ethical

clearances. In relation to research projects, potential consequences of the research shall be carefully assessed and ethical aspects evaluated. The legal framework of a research project also includes documented agreements on the rights of use concerning the related research data and results.

## **11. Dimensions of Performance and Evaluation Criteria**

When assessing the performance of researchers, aspects beyond purely academic output may also be taken into consideration. The evaluation of performance is primarily based on qualitative standards, while quantitative indicators can only be incorporated into the overall assessment in a differentiated and reflective manner. Where provided voluntarily, individual circumstances reflected in CVs are also considered in the evaluation, alongside the categories set out in the General Equal Treatment Act.

## **12. Ombudspersons**

The Academy has established the office of an Ombudsperson to whom its members and staff may turn with questions regarding good research practice or in cases of suspected academic misconduct. On the proposal of the plenary assembly of members, the President appoints an ordinary member of the Academy to serve as Ombudsperson for a term of four years. Only members who are not simultaneously part of the Executive Board, the Executive Committee, the Structural Commission, or the Project Commission of the Academy may be appointed as Ombudsperson. Reappointment is possible. The Academy shall ensure that the Ombudsperson is made sufficiently known within the Academy. A deputy shall be designated to act in cases where there is a concern of conflict of interest or where the Ombudsperson is otherwise prevented from fulfilling his or her duties.

The Ombudsperson offers to mediate between the parties involved in a conflict. He or she examines each submitted allegation of breaching the rules of good research practice for plausibility, specificity and significance, and advises the Executive Board on matters relating to safeguarding good research practice. The Ombudsperson does not conduct an investigative procedure with hearings of the parties concerned. This responsibility lies with the Investigation Committee. In carrying out his or her duties, the Ombudsperson acts independently and is not subject to instructions, and is supported in his or her work by the Academy both substantively and administratively. The Ombuds procedure remains confidential throughout and also after its conclusion.

In addition to the option of contacting the Academy's Ombudsperson at any time, all Academy employees may choose instead to approach the "Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany" of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

## **II. Breach of Good Research Practice**

### **1. Academic Misconduct**

Sanctionable academic misconduct occurs when, in a research-relevant context, false statements are made intentionally or through gross negligence, intellectual property rights of others are violated, or their research activities are otherwise harmed.

Academic misconduct may, in particular, include the following:

- false statements, particularly the fabrication of data and/or research results, as well as the falsification of data and/or research results, for example through undisclosed selective reporting of results, or manipulation of presentations or figures,

- incorrect information in an application letter or funding proposal (including false claims regarding publications or works in press),
- the use of texts created by other authors and presenting them as one's own without their consent (so-called ghost-writing),
- violation of the intellectual property of others, especially concerning copyrighted works created by others or significant research findings, hypotheses, theories, or approaches originating from others, through unauthorised exploitation with assumption of authorship (plagiarism), misappropriation of research ideas and approaches (idea theft), unauthorised disclosure of data, theories, and findings to third parties, unjustified assumption or claim of academic authorship or co-authorship, unauthorised publication and making available to third parties while the work, findings, hypothesis, theory, or research approach have not yet been published, or claiming (co-)authorship of others without their consent,
- damage, destruction, manipulation, or theft of data, sources, records, and equipment used in or created during research work,
- obstruction of academic discourse within the various working units, or
- accusation of a person of violating good research practice despite knowing this to be untrue.

A shared responsibility for academic misconduct may also arise from participation in the academic misconduct of others, from (co-)authorship of publications containing falsifications, or from gross neglect of supervisory or mentoring duties.

## **2. Procedures in Cases of Suspected Academic Misconduct**

a. Allegations of academic misconduct that are made in good faith may be submitted to the Academy's Ombudsperson at any time, whether anonymously or openly. If the Ombudsperson knows the identity of the informant, this information shall be treated confidentially and disclosed to third parties only with the informant's consent. An exception applies only where there is a legal obligation to reveal the name, or where the person accused would otherwise be unable to mount an adequate defence due to being unaware of the informant's identity.

b. If the allegation of academic misconduct appears sufficiently specific, substantiated, and supported by evidence, the Ombudsperson shall initiate an investigation. The Ombudsperson shall inform the President of the opening of the proceedings, but shall not disclose the names of either the complainant or the person accused.

c. The Ombudsperson shall appoint an ordinary member of the relevant class, together with a research associate, to jointly conduct the investigation. Both members of the investigation committee should not be affiliated with the broader context of the research project of either the complainant or the accused. They shall be informed of the names of the complainant and the accused as well as of the substance of the complaint, and they are required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and to maintain confidentiality regarding the names of the persons involved. If, with respect to a member of a committee, there exists ground for exclusion or reasonable suspicion of bias pursuant to Sections 20 or 21 of the Administrative Procedures Act (*Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz*) or under the Code of Criminal Procedure (*Strafprozessordnung*), that member shall be replaced by his or her designated deputy.

The initiation of the investigation procedure shall not result in any disadvantage to either the informant or the accused with regard to their own academic or professional advancement. Until proven otherwise, the presumption of innocence shall apply.

d. The investigators shall ascertain all incriminating and exculpatory circumstances. They shall then inform the accused, without disclosing the identity of the informant, of the alleged academic misconduct and shall give him or her the opportunity to comment within two weeks. The response may be given in writing or orally. In the case of an oral statement, a written record of the hearing shall be made, which shall be read to and approved by the accused.

e. On the basis of all the facts ascertained and the statement of the accused, the investigators shall assess the allegation of academic misconduct by means of open evaluation of evidence. They are authorised and obliged, within the scope of their possibilities, to take all steps necessary to clarify the facts of the case, in particular to obtain further statements and information. In individual cases, they may consult qualified expert reviewers as well as other specialists with expertise in handling such matters for advice.

f. The investigators shall inform the accused of all incriminating facts and available evidence. Upon request, both the accused and, where applicable, the informant shall be given the opportunity to comment. For this purpose, they may each be accompanied by a trusted person as counsel. A written record (minutes) of the statement should be prepared.

g. If the identity of the informant is not known to the accused, such identity shall be disclosed where this information is necessary for an adequate defence, in particular if the credibility of the informant is of material importance for establishing the academic misconduct.

h. Regardless of the outcome of the proceedings, the Academy guarantees protection for both the informant and the accused. The informant shall not suffer any disadvantage as a result of submitting the allegation, provided that the accusation was not demonstrably made in bad faith. In the event of proven innocence, the Academy shall take appropriate measures to protect the wrongfully accused person from harm to their reputation or professional position.

### **3. Conclusion of Proceedings**

a. After completing the investigation, the investigators shall report the outcome to the President, submitting all relevant documents and stating whether, in their view, academic misconduct has been established or not.

b. The President shall review the formal conduct of the proceedings and form an independent judgement on the basis of the submitted report. If the President identifies procedural errors or deems further clarification of facts to be necessary, he or she shall return the matter to the investigation committee with appropriate instructions. The committee shall then reopen the investigation and conclude it in accordance with these instructions.

c. If the President does not consider academic misconduct to be proven, the proceedings shall be closed. The essential reasons leading to the closure of the proceedings shall be communicated in writing without delay to the respondent and, where applicable, to the informant.

d. If, after careful consideration of all circumstances, the President considers academic misconduct by a member of the Academy or a research employee to be proven, he or she shall consult with the chairpersons of the classes about possible further steps and examine which measures should be taken. In the case of proven allegations against employees of the Academy, measures to be considered include, in particular, employment law, civil law, or criminal law actions, or the retraction of publications. In the case of proven allegations against members of the Academy, depending on the severity of the violation, sanctions concerning membership status may also be considered in addition to legal action. These may include temporary or permanent revocation of membership; furthermore,

it is possible to withdraw a member's right to propose and vote for a period of two years.

If they have a legitimate interest, and after careful consideration of proportionality, other academic institutions and universities, other researchers, scientific journals or publishers, funding bodies and research organisations, professional associations, ministries, or the public may also be informed. The person concerned shall be heard before a decision is made. Measures deemed necessary in view of the seriousness of the proven academic misconduct will be taken without delay, insofar as they fall within the Academy's responsibility; otherwise, the relevant competent bodies or authorities will be notified.

e. All persons involved in the proceedings are obliged to maintain confidentiality regarding all matters that become known to them in the course of the proceedings, notwithstanding any other obligations arising from their membership in the Academy, unless a fact is already public knowledge or by its nature does not require confidentiality. The provisions of civil service and labour law regarding the duty of confidentiality and the consequences of breaching this duty remain unaffected.

f. All steps of the proceedings as described under III. 2. and 3. of these regulations shall be carried out within reasonable timeframes.

g. The records of the investigation shall be retained for 30 years.