

Editorial: How to use GenAI to find the errors in your reference list (yes, there most likely are some)

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1. The problem

As Editor for *JALL*, I have copy edited over 300 papers, and the bane of my existence is identifying missing information and incorrect formatting in reference lists and either fixing these myself or asking authors to fix the problems (and then having to check those fixes). While I have not kept careful records, I think there have only been a handful of papers with no issues to address in their reference list, and only a relatively small percentage with only a small number of issues. The bulk of papers have several issues to address, and the worst have reference lists with multiple referencing styles in them.

While we all might think we have better things to do with our time than proofread reference lists, such proofreading is necessary because it is unacceptable for an international journal to publish articles with errors in reference lists. And from an author's perspective, what does it say about your attention to detail, and hence potentially the quality of your research in general, if there are multiple errors in your reference list? One might think the solution is to use a bibliographic management program like EndNote, but as explained in Section 2, even EndNote generated lists typically still have multiple issues that need "tidying up". So, the problems in reference lists need to be fixed, but doing so is tedious and difficult, even if one uses a bibliographic management program, thus raising the question, *can a generative AI (GenAI) tool help with this task?*

While I strongly recommend *against* using a generic large language model (LLM) like Copilot or ChatGPT to simply *fix* any problems for you – the risk and consequences of hallucinated details are too high¹ – my testing of an enterprise version of Microsoft's Copilot indicates that with a little coaching, it *can* help authors to reliably *identify* most if not all of the issues that need to be addressed and provide guidance on how to fix the issues if EndNote has been used. Consequently, the purpose of this editorial is to provide an engineered prompt for authors (and readers' students) to use, together with a list of potential sources of confusion when using this prompt. Although this editorial is primarily directed at prospective authors to *JALL*, I have included more detail and examples than such an audience probably needs with the thought that those extra details and examples could be useful for instructional materials for students.

To be clear, the prompt provided in this editorial is aimed at reference lists that have either been created manually or created using a bibliographic management program like EndNote. The prompt will *not* check whether a reference list created by a generic large language model (LLM), such as ChatGPT, or those created by specialised literature review tools such as [Elicit](#) or [SciSpace](#), include hallucinated references or reference details. Authors using AI to generate reference lists need to be aware that while the accuracy of the references created by LLMs has improved dramatically over the last couple of years (Aydin et al., 2026), relatively recent testing has revealed they are still not completely reliable (Gibney, 2025). And anecdotally, AI generated reference lists can still be highly problematic. For example, a recent editorial reported that journal recently receiving an article with a large number of hallucinated references (Liu, 2026), as has also recently been the case for *JALL*. An assessment of the accuracy of tools such as Elicit and SciSpace lie outside the scope of this editorial, but best practice is to check all references for accuracy.²

Proceeding from this background, in the next section I explain why bibliographic management tools do not produce error free reference lists either (though the issues have to do with formatting and incomplete information rather than hallucinations), and then in Section 3, I catalogue commonly seen issues in EndNote generated reference lists and explain how to fix them as the GenAI prompt cannot fix an EndNote database by itself. Then, in Section 4, I provide the engineered prompt and explain some possible points of confusion when using it. I finish with a request to

¹ Scandals relating to important materials incorporating hallucinated references are still occurring at the time of writing. For example, a Springer Nature book on [machine learning had to be retracted](#) because of many hallucinated references (Retraction Watch, 2025), and an application by a University of Sydney-based institute lobbying for 20 million dollars of gambling education funding was found to have [significant problems in its reference list](#) (Davey, 2026). I have also worked with a student who used a GenAI tool to create a reference list from sources she had found who had got into trouble because the chatbot had got many of the details incorrect.

² Some readers may be aware of other AI-powered citation generators, like [MyBib](#) and [Scribbr](#), which seem to work a bit like EndNote in that a user gives the tool a link to a source, the tool then scans that source for the relevant information, and then it creates a formatted reference list entry. However, Scribbr did *not* produce a correct reference for a *JALL* article, and while MyBib seems much better, it does not know about article numbers for journal articles, and won't convert a journal title in title case into sentence case as the APA 7 style requires, so users of such tools cannot expect them to create perfect citations for them.

prospective authors that they use the guidance in this editorial before they submit their manuscript to JALL.

2. Using EndNote or equivalent will not by itself solve the problem for you

I suspect that there may be a common misconception that if you use bibliographic management software like EndNote, that the software will “get things right for you and so you do not have to proofread your reference list”. Unfortunately, EndNote is only as good as the information fed into it, and quite regularly that information is incomplete, incorrectly formatted or incorrectly filed. Again, I have not made a systematic study, but my impression after looking at many EndNote created reference lists in student work and in papers submitted to *JALL* is that, on average, perhaps something like one third of such references have issues that need to be corrected. If you are not aware of what to look out for, I have compiled a list of the most common issues I have seen in the next section and explain how to fix the issues, with some of the fixes not self-evident.

3. Commonly seen issues in EndNote created reference lists and how to fix them

In the examples below, the issues are highlighted in yellow, and sometimes also with a red font, with corrections highlighted in green. In fixing such issues, there are two approaches one can take. The first option is to edit the reference in your EndNote database, save the changes, then in Word, click on, “Update Citations and Bibliography”, in the EndNote tab. This approach can be slow and tedious if there are many such corrections to make, but is worth the effort in the long run if you are likely to cite the same sources in multiple places, as researchers and PhD students are likely to do.

When there are many corrections needed, a quicker fix, but only in the short term, is to edit your reference list manually in your Word document. For any such changes to stick, however, in Word’s EndNote tab, one should first convert the citations and bibliography to plain text (Figure 1), otherwise EndNote is likely to reassert its formatting. Only do this once your reference list is complete. Of course, with this approach, the errors will remain in your EndNote library, but this is not a problem if you are unlikely to reuse those sources.

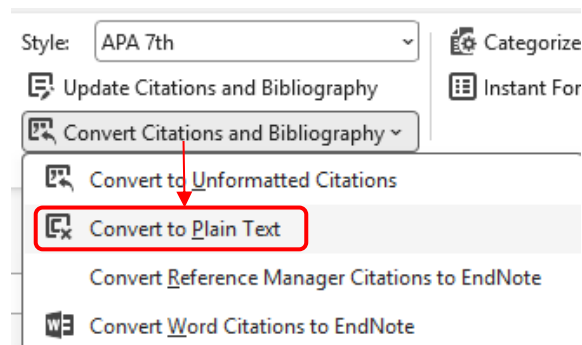


Figure 1. Using the EndNote tab in Word: How to convert an End-Note created reference list to plain text so it can be edited within the Word document without EndNote reapplying its formatting.

3.1. Repeated URL stem in the DOI

Example:

Morales, H., Perfecto, I., & Ferguson, B. (2001). Traditional fertilization and its effect on corn insect populations in the Guatemalan highlands. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, 84(2), 145-155. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8809\(00\)00200-0](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8809(00)00200-0)

Cause: The URL form of the DOI has been inserted into EndNote's DOI field.

Fix: Delete the <https://doi.org/> stem in EndNote's DOI field. That is, EndNote's DOI field should only include the number starting with 10, in this case 10.1016/S0167-8809(00)00200-0 (Figure 2). EndNote will then add the <https://doi.org/> stem to the DOI when it creates the reference list.

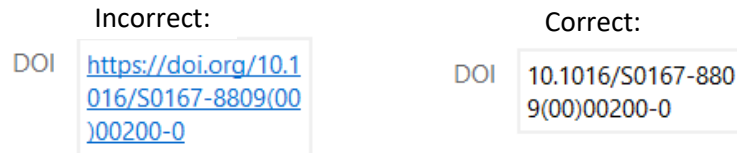


Figure 2. Screenshots of the DOI field in EndNote illustrating incorrect and correct content.

Missing DOIs are also a common problem, with the fix being to find the DOI either from the paper itself or from the paper's journal web page, and then copying the number part from that DOI into EndNote's DOI field.

It is also worth noting here that Google Scholar's cite tool does *not* include the DOI in the citation, and may not use title case for the journal title (Figure 3), and so is *not* a completely reliable tool for creating reference lists.

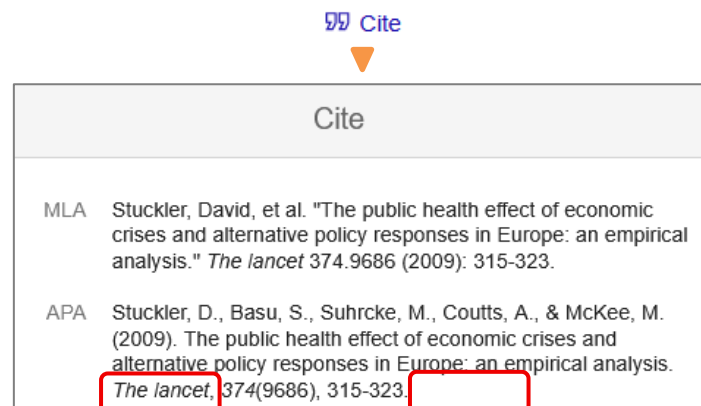


Figure 3. Screenshot of a Google Scholar created reference list entry illustrating a missing DOI and a journal title in sentence rather than title case.

3.2. An article number treated as a page number

Example:

Supapo, K. R. M., Lozano, L., Tabañag, I. D. F., & Querikiol, E. M. (2021). A geospatial approach to energy planning in aid of just energy transition in small island communities in the Philippines. *Applied Sciences*, 11(24), 11955. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app112411955>

In this example, only a single number appears in the page range position, and that number is suspiciously large, suggesting that the number is not in fact a page number but rather an article number.

Issue: In some journals, articles are paginated consecutively throughout an issue so that the page range of an article can help readers find the article in an issue, hence the page range is included in the APA 7 formatted bibliographic details. Many journals now, however, start all articles at page 1 (this may be so articles can get advanced publication before they get allocated to an issue) and so the page range does not help readers locate an article in an issue. In such cases, many

journals give articles an “article number” which can help readers locate the article in an issue. In such cases, the correct APA 7 reference list formatting is (American Psychological Association, 2025):

Author, A. A. (Year). Title. *Journal Title*, Vol(Issue), **Article** e12345.
<https://doi.org/10.xx>

Unfortunately, the data downloaded from journals into EndNote often files the article number in the page range field and so the reference list entry is missing the word “Article” before the article number. It may also be the case that the journal’s guide to the correct way to cite the article may be missing the word “Article” (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Example of a journal giving an incorrectly formatted citation style (Source: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/11/24/11955>). In this case, the article number does not have the word, “Article”, preceding it, and the article title is in title rather than sentence case.

Clues that this issue *may* be the case are:

- only one number in the page range position
- that number being unrealistically large (e.g. 114627)
- or that number having a letter prefix (e.g. e12345), though journals do also use letters to label articles in different sections of the journal (e.g. a letters section might have page numbers starting with “L”).

Fix: The first thing to do is to check that the issue isn’t just that the final page number is missing from the page range. This can be done by looking at the pagination of the pdf version of the article. If the article starts at page 1, the number in EndNote is an article not page number. To fix this issue, simply cut and paste the article number from the *Pages* field in EndNote into the *Article Number* field (Figure 5), save the change, then in Word, update your citations and bibliography.



Figure 5. Screenshots of incorrectly and correctly located article numbers in EndNote.

3.3. Journal titles in sentence rather than title case and article titles in title rather than sentence case

Example:

Santhanam-Martin, M., & Nettle, R. (2014). **Governing Australia's Dairy Farm Workforce: A New Terrain for Negotiating Rural Community Sustainability.** *International journal of sociology of agriculture and food*, 21(1), 31-50.

The correct format for the journal title is *title* not *sentence* case, that is, **International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food.**

Fix: In EndNote: Library > Open Terms Lists > Journals Term List > Edit Term (Figure 6).

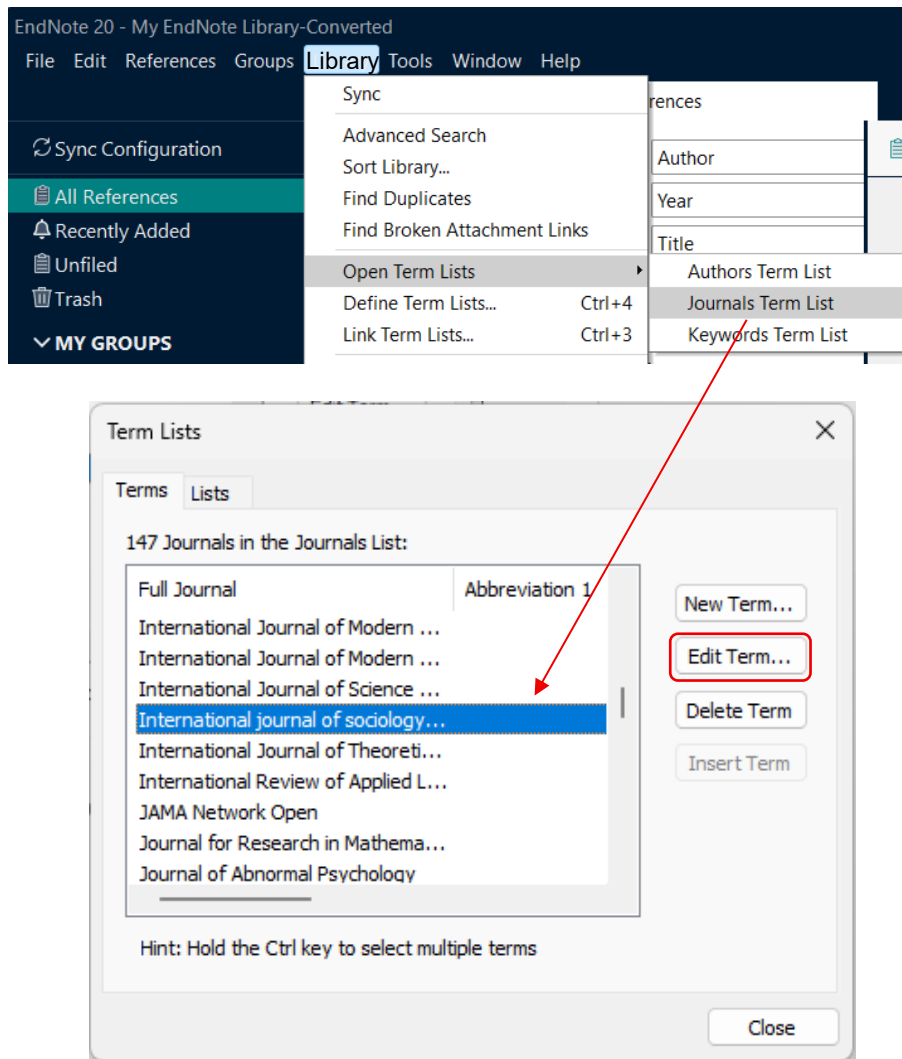


Figure 6. Procedure for fixing journal titles appearing in sentence rather than title case in EndNote.

This example has a second error, and that is that the title of the article should be in sentence rather than title case, with a capital letter following the colon. That is, the title of the article should have the format:

Governing Australia's dairy farm workforce: A new terrain for negotiating rural community sustainability.

Fix: In your EndNote database, simply make the required edits in the title field, save the changes, then in the EndNote tab in Word, choose to “Update Citations and Bibliography”.

If manually making case type fixes in your Word document, Word has a “change case” menu item that can help (Figure 7). However, the output of this tool often still needs some additional editing (e.g. the articles “a” and “the” do not have first letter capitals in title case, but Word will give them such). You may also find you first need to apply the UPPERCASE option before the “Sentence case” option will correctly apply.

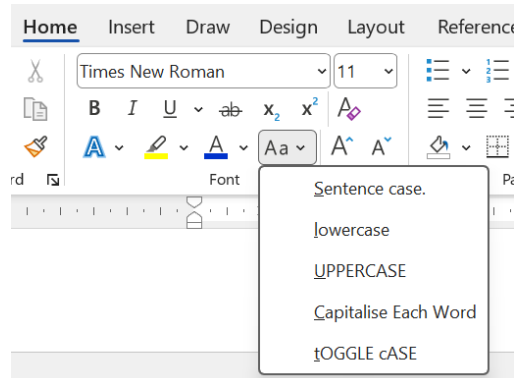


Figure 7. Word’s “change case” menu item. To get “Sentence case” to work, you may have first do something like apply “UPPERCASE” then apply “Sentence case”.

3.4. Corporate authors treated as a human author

Example:

Reduction, U. N. O. f. D. R. (2012). *Using GIS for disaster risk reduction*.
<https://www.undrr.org/news/using-gis-disaster-risk-reduction>

Issue: This is a “rookie” error made when entering a reference manually into EndNote when there is a corporate author. In this case, the author is: “United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction”.

Fix: In the author field in EndNote, put a comma at the end of the organisation’s name so that EndNote treats the whole name as being like the family name of a person (Figure 8).

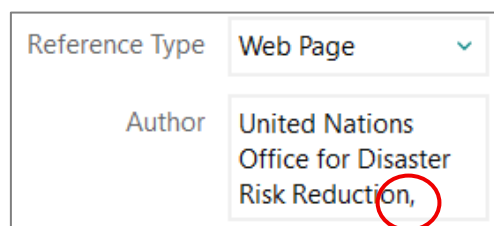


Figure 8. To get EndNote to format corporate authors correctly, put a comma at the end of the organisation’s name.

4. On how to get a chatbot to help you identify the issues that need addressing, and some things to be aware of

4.1. A suggested prompt

The prompt below was developed after testing and was tweaked based on feedback from Claude.ai (Anthropic, 2026). Aspects of the prompt are obvious, but when it was discovered that feedback on article numbers was inadequate, guidance to the chatbot on those was added. Then, because the prompt is also meant to be helpful to those new to EndNote, and how to solve issues with EndNote is not always obvious, guidance on fixing common EndNote errors was also added.

It is important to note that the prompt does *not* check for hallucinated details, and so is only useful for checking reference lists created manually or by using an app like EndNote, not for checking reference lists created using GenAI tools which may include hallucinated details. It is also hoped that for frequent users of the APA 7 referencing style, that after a couple of uses, users of the prompt will learn what they need to look out for and so be able to conduct more efficient manual checks for themselves.

Step 1: Upload your document.

If you are concerned about confidential information in your document leaking, only upload the reference list.

Step 2: Copy and paste this prompt.

Please act as an APA 7 referencing expert. Use clear, plain English — short sentences and simple vocabulary.

STEP 1 — Before beginning your review, ask me one question: Was EndNote used to generate this reference list? Wait for my answer before proceeding.

STEP 2 — Review the reference list in the attached document. For each reference, check for any missing information (e.g. DOI or URL, page numbers etc.) or incorrect formatting (e.g. for title capitalisation, sentence case for articles/books, title case for journals; article numbers should be preceded by the word, “Article”; each reference should be formatted with a half inch or 1.27 cm hanging indent; etc.). Also check that the references have been ordered alphabetically by the first author’s family name.

STEP 3 — Report your findings reference by reference. Only include references where you found errors. For each:

- State what the error is
- State what needs to be corrected
- Provide the relevant APA 7 generic format as a template so I can apply the fix myself

Example template: Author, A. A. (Year). Title of article. *Journal Name*, *volume*(issue), pages. <https://doi.org/xxxxx>

Do not provide a corrected reference list.

STEP 4 — If EndNote was used (from Step 1), add guidance after each relevant error explaining how to fix it in EndNote using the guidance below. After each relevant error, provide **clear, step-by-step instructions** for fixing the issue in EndNote suitable for novice EndNote users.

STEP 5 — End with a short, bulleted summary of the most common error types found, then direct me to this guide for further help: <https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/apa7>

ENDNOTE GUIDANCE: Errors and corrections (use only if EndNote was confirmed in Step 1)

- DOI duplicated (e.g. <https://doi.org/10.xxx> in the DOI field)
 - In the DOI field, delete the URL stem — keep only the number starting with 10.xxx
- Journal title in sentence case, abbreviated, or all capitals
 - Edit the journal title in the Journals Terms List (provide complete instructions): In EndNote, follow the menu chain: Library > Open Terms List > Journals Term List
- Journal article missing a DOI or URL
 - Find the DOI or URL on the article's webpage. Paste only the number (10.xxx) into the DOI field, or the full URL into the URL field.
- Single number appears in the page range position
 - If the number is very large or oddly formatted, it is likely an article number. Move it from the Pages field to the Article Number field so that the word "Article" appears before it in your output. Otherwise, check the article's webpage or PDF for the final page number. If the PDF starts on page 1 rather than the number in the Pages field, treat it as an article number.

(Note: this issue also occurs in manually formatted reference lists.)

- Organisation name formatted like a person's name (e.g. split into first/last)
 - In the Author field, type the organisation's full name followed by a comma (e.g. World Health Organization,)
- Edited book chapter missing editors or book title
 - Add the missing details to the Editor and Book Title fields in the reference record.

Note: The asterisks in the above prompt are Markdown formatting code indicating the enclosed text should be italicised (Markdown Guide, 2026). These were added because the prompt when copy and pasted into a chatbot's text window lost the italicisation. The chatbots I have tested understand when Markdown code is being used, but whether the chatbot you use does or not can be checked before using the prompt by asking it.

Figure 9 provides an example of corrective feedback provided by Copilot, illustrating that the feedback appears to be clear and easy to apply.

Aromataris & Munn (2020)

Errors

- Editors are shown as “(eds)” instead of **(Eds.)**
- URL is fine, but no publisher is listed.

Correction needed

- Use **(Eds.)**
- Include the publisher name.

APA 7 template

Editor, A. A., & Editor, B. B. (Eds.). (Year). *Title of book*. Publisher. URL

Figure 9. Example of corrective feedback provided by Copilot.

4.2. Potential issues to be aware of: Copilot is very good, but not perfect

In my testing, I only found one piece of advice by Copilot that was incorrect, and that is it said that the page range for a chapter in an edited book should go after the editors' names when in fact it should go after the title of the book. That is, the correct formatting for a chapter in an edited book is (University of Queensland, 2026):

Author(s) of chapter – family name and initials, use & for multiple authors.
 (Year). Title of chapter. In Editor(s) – initial(s) and family name - of
 book (Ed. OR Eds.), *Title of book – italicised* (pp. Page num-
 bers). Publisher. DOI or Web address (if available)

However, I have also found that Copilot (5 February, 2026) asks you to check things that are in fact correct, so once checked, just ignore that feedback. For example:

- (a) When a DOI is in hyperlink rather than plain text form, Copilot said things like:

URL formatting: The DOI is correct, but APA 7 prefers the
 “https://doi.org/...” format **without brackets**.

But there were no brackets. Since Copilot did not make a comment about brackets when the DOI was in plain text format, presumably Copilot is “seeing” Microsoft Word's formatting field codes. That is, Word formats hyperlinks in the form:

{HYPERLINK “https://...”}

with the formatting codes generally invisible to readers.

- (b) Copilot “knows” that journal titles should be in title case, but doesn't seem to always be able to tell whether or not a title case has been used, so says things like:

Journal title capitalisation: “Singapore Journal of Tropical Geogra-
 phy” must use correct title case (your version is close but may require
 checking).

- (c) Copilot also occasionally had some problems telling what text was and was not italicised, saying things like:

Italics formatting: Both the **journal title** and the **volume number** should be italicised; the issue number should not be.

when the required formatting had in fact been followed.

- (d) Copilot seems to have some problems reading Word documents, saying things like:

Extraneous punctuation/spacing around the journal and volume: There should be a space between the journal title comma and the volume number, and no stray formatting characters.

It may also claim that there are extra spaces when there are not, again possibly because of hidden formatting codes. Use the “show formatting” menu item, ¶ , to check for extra spaces. Once checked, these extraneous comments can be ignored, or try using a pdf file instead.

Nevertheless, despite these minor issues, Copilot does seem to be helpful in identifying issues with reference lists, especially for authors lacking in experience with APA 7 formatting, and those short on time.

A request to prospective authors

For readers planning to submit papers to JALL, now that you know how to use GenAI to find the formatting and missing information issues in your reference list, and you also now know how to fix those issues if you are using EndNote, please do so before submission. Feedback on your experiences with using the prompt, especially any problems, are welcome to aid further refinement if needed.

My hope for frequent users of the APA 7 referencing style is that after using the prompt a couple of times, that you would then learn what issues to watch out for and then be able to make manual checks which can be expected to be faster once expertise has been developed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kate Chanock for helpful feedback which led to improvements in clarity and additional EndNote issues being identified and addressed, and Anna Podorova for helpful feedback leading to several revisions.

Declarations

1. **Competing / conflict of interests:** I declare no conflicts of interest. In particular, while the prompt was tested using Microsoft Copilot, this should not be taken as particular endorsement of that GenAI tool; other GenAI tools are likely to work just as well, but should be tested for accuracy.
2. **Use of Generative AI:** An enterprise version of Microsoft’s Copilot was used to test the prompt on a variety of reference lists. The prompt was iteratively developed by myself, but feedback on the “final version” was obtained from Claude.ai (Anthropic, 2026). This feedback led to one element of the instructions being relocated and some minor condensing and reformatting of other text. All other elements of this editorial are entirely human written.

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