COUNTER Code of Practice
1.0 Introduction

Since its inception in 2002, COUNTER has been focused on providing a code of practice that helps ensure librarians have access to consistent, comparable, and credible usage reporting for their online scholarly information. COUNTER serves librarians, content providers, and others by facilitating the recording and exchange of online usage statistics. The COUNTER Code of Practice provides guidance on data elements to be measured and definitions of these data elements, as well as guidelines for output report content and formatting and requirements for data processing and auditing. To have their usage statistics and reports designated COUNTER compliant, content providers MUST provide usage statistics that conform to the current Code of Practice.

1.1. General Information

1.1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the COUNTER Code of Practice is to facilitate the recording, exchange, and interpretation of online usage data by establishing open international standards and protocols for the provision of content-provider-generated usage statistics that are consistent, comparable, and credible.

1.1.2 Scope

This COUNTER Code of Practice provides a framework for the recording and exchange of online usage statistics for the major categories of e-resources (journals, databases, books, reference works, and multimedia databases) at an international level. In doing so, it covers the following areas: data elements to be measured, definitions of these data elements, content and format of usage reports, requirements for data processing, requirements for auditing, and guidelines to avoid duplicate counting.

1.1.3 Application

COUNTER is designed for librarians, content providers and others who require reliable online usage statistics. The guidelines provided by this Code of Practice enable librarians to compare statistics from different platforms, to make better-informed purchasing decisions, and to plan more effectively. COUNTER also provides content providers with the detailed specifications they need to follow to generate data in a format useful to their customers, to compare the relative usage of different delivery channels, and to learn more about online usage patterns. COUNTER also provides guidance to others interested in information about online usage statistics.

1.1.4 Strategy

COUNTER provides an open Code of Practice that evolves in response to the demands of the international library and content provider communities. The Code of Practice is continually under review; feedback on its scope and application are actively sought from all interested parties. See Section 12 below.

1.1.5 Governance

The COUNTER Code of Practice is owned and developed by Counter Online Metrics (COUNTER), a non-profit distributing company registered in England. A Board of Directors governs Counter Online Metrics. An Executive Committee reports to the Board, and the day-to-day management of COUNTER is the responsibility of the Project Director.

1.1.6 Definitions

This Code of Practice provides definitions of data elements and other terms that are relevant, not only to the usage reports specified in Release 5 (R5), but also to other reports that content providers may wish to generate. Every effort has been made to use existing ISO, NISO, etc. definitions where appropriate, and these sources are cited (see Appendix A).

1.1.7 Versions

The COUNTER Code of Practice will be extended and upgraded as necessary based on input from the communities it serves. Each new version will be made available as a numbered release on the COUNTER website; users will be alerted to its availability. R5 of the Code of Practice replaces Release 4 (R4) of the Code of Practice. The deadline date for implementation of this Release is 01-Jan-2019. After this date, only those content providers compliant with R5 will be deemed compliant with the Code of Practice.

COUNTER R5 introduces a continuous maintenance process (see Section 12 below) that will allow the Code of Practice to evolve over time minimizing the need for major version changes.

1.1.8 Auditing and COUNTER Compliance

An independent annual audit is REQUIRED of each content provider's reports and processes to certify that they are COUNTER compliant. The auditing process is designed to be simple, straightforward and not unduly burdensome or costly to the content provider while providing reassurance to customers of the reliability of the COUNTER usage data. See Section 9 below and Appendix E for more details.

1.1.9 Relationship to other Standards, Protocols and Codes

The COUNTER Code of Practice builds on several existing industry initiatives and standards that address content provider-based online performance measures. Where appropriate, definitions of data elements and other terms from these sources have been used in this Code of Practice, and these are identified in Appendix A.

1.1.10 Making Comments on the Code of Practice

The COUNTER Executive Committee welcomes comments on the Code of Practice (see Section 12 below).

1.2 Changes from COUNTER Release 4

Changes in the nature of online content and how it is accessed have resulted in the COUNTER Code of Practice evolving in an attempt to accommodate those changes. This evolution resulted in some ambiguities and, in some cases, conflicts and confusions within the Code of Practice. R5 of the COUNTER Code of Practice is focused on improving the clarity, consistency, and comparability of usage reporting.

1.2.1 List of Reports

R5 of the COUNTER Code of Practice reduces the overall number of reports by replacing many of the special-purpose reports that are seldom used with a small number of flexible generic reports. All COUNTER R4 reports have either been renamed or eliminated in favour of other COUNTER R5 report options.

See Appendix B, Section 1.1 for more details.

1.2.2 Report Format

The Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI) protocol used in R4 was designed to simplify the gathering of usage statistics by librarians. In R5 the SOAP/XML based SUSHI protocol is replaced with the RESTful COUNTER_SUSHI API that uses JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) for a more lightweight data-interchange. The JSON format not only is easy for humans to read and write, but it is easy for machines to parse and generate. Support of the COUNTER_SUSHI API is mandatory for compliance with R5 (see Section 8 below).

With R5, all COUNTER reports are structured the same way to ensure consistency, not only between reports, but also between the JSON and tabular versions of the reports. Now, all reports share the same format for the header, the report body is derived from the same set of element names, total rows have been eliminated, and data values are consistent between the JSON and tabular version. R5 also addresses the problems of terminology and report layouts varying from report to report, as well as JSON and tabular versions of the same report producing different results while still being compliant.

1.2.3 Metric Types

R5 strives for simplicity and clarity by reducing the number of Metric_Types and applying these Metric_Types across all reports, as applicable. With R4, Book Reports had metric types that could be considered different from metric types in Journal Reports and metric types attempting to reflect additional attributes such as mobile usage, usage by format, etc. Most R4 metric types have either been renamed or eliminated in favour of new R5 Metric_Types.

See Appendix B, Section B.1.2 for a table showing the R4 metric types and their R5 equivalence or status.

1.2.4 New Elements and Attributes Introduced

With R4 the nature of the usage sometimes had to be inferred based on the name of the report. To provide more consistent and comparable reporting, R5 introduces some additional attributes that content providers can use to create breakdowns and summaries of usage.

Access_Type	Used to track usage of content that is either OA_Gold (Gold Open Access) or Controlled (requires a license).
Access_Method	Used to track if the purpose of the access was for regular use or for text and data mining (TDM). This attribute allows TDM usage to be excluded from Standard Views and reported on separately.
Data_Type	Identifies the type of content usage being reported on. Expanded to include additional Data_Types, including Article, Book, Book_Segment, Database, Dataset, Journal, Multimedia, Newspaper_or_Newsletter, Other, Platform, Report, Repository_Item, and Thesis_or_Dissertation.
Publisher_ID	Introduced to improve matching and reporting by publisher.
Section_Type	Identifies the type of section that was accessed by the user, including Article, Book, Chapter, Other and Section. Used primarily for reporting on book usage where content is delivered by section.
YOP	Year of publication as a single element, simplifies reporting by content age.

The above items are covered in more detail in Section 3 below as well as in Appendix B, Section B.1.3.