

AUTHORSHIP

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Authorship

Definition of author: *An author of a scientific/research manuscript is one who contributes mentally and spiritually to the scientific content, moulds the research aspect in a presentable and understandable form. The efforts involved are tremendous and creditworthy.*

Criteria for Authorship

The *International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)* recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria:

- 1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work;**
- 2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content;**
- 3. Final approval of the version to be published;**
- 4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.**

The 4th criterion precisely meant for **responsibility** and **accountability**.

- **Responsibility** is defined as the moral obligation to ensure that a particular task is adequately performed. Accordingly, responsibility relates to tasks that have been assigned to an individual.
- **Accountability** denotes the duty to justify a given action to others and to respond for the results of that action. Therefore, accountability mainly relates to the awareness and assumption of the role of being the one to blame if things go wrong.

According to the ICMJE persons who **do not qualify as an author** include those who **'only'** provide:

(1) recruitment of patients to a trial, (2) general data collection, (3) obtaining samples for a study, (4) acquisition of funding, (5) general supervision of the research group by the department chairperson.

Conversely, persons who significantly contributed to the paper but do not meet the four criteria for authorship should be listed in the **acknowledgement** section after obtaining their consent.

Sequence of Authorship

Riesenberg and Lundberg [JAMA 1990;264:1857] have made certain very important and simple suggestions to decide the sequence of authorship:

- 1. The first author should be that person who contributed most to the work, including writing of the manuscript.**
- 2. The sequence of authors should be determined by the relative overall contributions to the manuscript.*
- 3. It is common practice to have the senior author appear last, sometimes regardless of his or her contribution. The senior author, like all other authors, should meet all criteria for authorship.*

Contd.....

4. The senior author sometimes takes responsibility for writing the paper, especially when the research student has not yet learned the skills of scientific writing. **The senior author then becomes the corresponding author, but should the student be the first author?** Some supervisors put their students first, others put their own names first. Perhaps it should be decided on the absolute amount of time spent on the project by the student (in getting the data) and the supervisor (in providing help and in writing the paper). Or perhaps the supervisor should be satisfied with being corresponding author, regardless of time committed to the project.
5. A sensible policy adopted by many supervisors is to give the student a fixed period of time (say 12 months) to write the first draft of the paper. If the student does not deliver, the supervisor may then write the paper and put her or his own name first.

Corresponding author

The ICMJE author guidelines describe a **corresponding author** as follows:

The corresponding author is the one individual who takes primary responsibility for communication with the journal during the manuscript submission, peer review, and publication process, and typically ensures that all the journal's administrative requirements, such as providing details of authorship, ethics committee approval, clinical trial registration documentation, and gathering conflict of interest forms and statements, are properly completed, although these duties may be delegated to one or more co-authors.

What does a 'corresponding author' do?

- 1. Prepare a submission-ready manuscript***
- 2. The person who uploads the manuscript to the online submission site, or sends it to the journal for peer review***
- 3. The primary contact between the journal and all the other authors of the paper***
- 4. Ensure that major deadlines are met or the "time keeper" during each phase of the publication process***
- 5. Responsible for distributing communications from the journal (e.g., decision letters, reviewers' reports).***
- 6. Competent person to whom readers can address questions, requests for materials, or even suggestions for further work.***

Fraudulent authorship

A **ghost author** is a person who has made a substantial contribution to the research or writing of a manuscript but is not named as an author. In some cases, acknowledged person may have actually met criteria that would qualify them as an author, and so even though acknowledged, they are technically ghosts.

A **hierarchical author** is someone who has been asked to write an editorial or prepare a review article on behalf of his/her superior and is published in a citable scientific journal, retrievable through the electronic bibliographic process under the name of the senior-level scientist.

A **guest author** is someone who is named as an author, but who did not contribute in a meaningful way to the design, research, analysis, or writing of a paper. There are several varieties of guest authors. Some persons accept honorary or gift authorship simply to enhance their curriculum vitae:

- ❖ ***Honorary authorship:*** Often they are well known and well respected thought leaders in the field of interest who are paid for use of their name. Some section or department heads are named as authors simply by virtue of their seniority or departmental tradition.
- ❖ ***Gift authorship:*** They might be invited to the masthead by the corresponding author in order to repay favors such as professional references or referrals. At times, scientists agree to trade authorships by each placing their name on the others' papers so each appears more productive.