

The Concept of “Fractional Authorship” in Academia

Author

Enago Academy

Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/concept-of-fractional-authorship/>

Publish or Perish

The concept of academic researchers feeling pressured to [publish on a regular basis](#) in order to maintain their prominence and relevance in the academic community has been around since the 1930s.

In the last quarter century, that pressure has increased even further in the face of declining funding opportunities and tenured institutional appointments. Résumés are updated almost daily, and [ORCID](#) accounts receive the same attention as researchers present their credentials to funding committees to establish why they have the right mix of skills and experience to conduct the research under consideration.

Authorship at Any Cost

As the number of graduate researchers continues to grow each year, the battle for research opportunities gets even more competitive. The opportunities for [sole authorship of research papers](#) or articles have struggled to keep up, even with the growth of open access journals.

In addition, a rising number of journal retractions have brought attention to the darker side of [academic publishing](#), where some researchers appear to be willing to bend the rules of research integrity in order to achieve an [authorship](#) credit.

Management of Authorship Potential

Researchers work with the same number of available hours in a day as everyone else. On that basis, writing opportunities have to be assessed in terms of their potential for success.

Do you hold out for a chance to be a sole author, or do you grab every available opportunity to get your name in print as a [co-author, contributor](#), or even research

assistant? Is it better to have an ORCID account with three sole authorship papers or thirty papers upon which you collaborated?

A study in Research Trends magazine in 2014 showed some interesting results. The average number of authors per paper had risen from 3.5 a decade ago to over 4 today, with a corresponding decline in sole authorship per article of 70.7%.

Thus, our stressed researchers are making a clear choice to maximize their authorship potential with a “fractional” approach on the premise that being the fifth or sixth listed author on multiple papers is a better use of that potential than holding out for joint authorship or sole [authorship](#) on far fewer papers.

An Unexpected Benefit

This openness to fractional authorship has produced an unexpected benefit. Being a fractional author requires you to collaborate with multiple colleagues and to find a way to clearly define multiple roles in each research project and in writing the consequent [research paper](#).

These are skills that have traditionally remained underdeveloped, as [authorship](#) has historically been assigned according to [rank](#) rather than actual contribution. Perhaps the cloud of [publish or perish](#) will have a silver lining after all, as the territorialism of scientific research is forced to break down barriers in order to get the research published.

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