

Description

At first glance, the status of a “lead author” would seem to be fairly straightforward. If most of the work of a particular study is done by only one researcher then his name should come first in the citation. However, unless an agreement is reached among all authors defining what “the most work” means, misunderstandings will inevitably ensue and could lead to a conflict of interest. This situation can quickly deteriorate further to even academic misconduct if the list of authors doesn’t accurately reflect the extent of involvement for each author.

Definition of a “Lead Author” and “Co-Author”

The definition of a lead author and co-author are commonly considered as follows:

1. *Lead Author:* He/She is also called as the first author and is the one who carries out the research as well as writes and edits the manuscript.
2. *Co-Author:* He/She is the one who collaborates with the lead author and makes significant contribution to the manuscript. A co-author also shares responsibility and accountability of the research outcome.

Assigning Authorship

One of the most significant issues in involving multiple authors in a research paper is the tendency to not be able to equally attribute each facet of the project to a specific researcher. For example, deference to seniority should not automatically equate to lead authorship status, but very often it does. The second assumption is that having a supervisor or senior author listed will improve both recognition and the chances of publication in a prestigious journal.

> Related: Made a decision on the lead and co-author for your research paper? **Check out this post for some orders and rules of authorship now!**

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At the other end, it is often assumed that junior researchers and staff members are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the team and do not expect to be acknowledged as authors. As they oftendo much of the legwork for large projects, this assumption is highly disrespectful.

4 Major Criteria to “Qualify” for Authorship Status

Operating on assumptions seriously undermines the importance of correct authorship status since such a designation carries with it academic, financial, and career implications. If the team has never worked together before and is committed to avoiding conflict over this issue, there are several good sources for general rules or codes of conduct that can be used to establish rules to which everyone can agree to comply. For example, the *International Committee of Medical Journal Editors* (ICMJE) criteria for authorship that should be met are as follows:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content
- Final approval of the work to be published
- 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.

Such rules may not help to resolve ego issues where individual team members expect recognition based on what they bring to the team, but by keeping the topic focused on workload and accountability; these rules carry the clear message that authorship is earned not granted.

How Does Co-authorship Work?

- The key to co-authoring is substantial contribution of multiple people authoring the manuscript.
- Co-authoring is made easier with document sharing.
- All authors must have editable access to the manuscript and must be aware of all the revisions that are made till the paper is published.
- Generally, in cases of co-authorship, the Article Processing Cost is divided equally among all authors.
- Ethical guidelines that regulate authorship must be duly followed.

Avoiding Conflict

No matter how many hierarchical ranks exist in your department, it is wise not to transfer the same bureaucratic headaches to your authorship team. There can be only one “lead author”, and the aim should be to recognize the remaining members as “co-authors” who agree, in advance, to what tasks they will each be responsible for. Any issues about the perceived fairness of such designations can then be addressed in advance rather than fighting over performance failure prior to publication.

Role and Responsibilities of Lead Author and Co-Author

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Lead Author	Co-Author
A lead author ideates the research topic.	A co-author works in collaboration with the lead author on the ideated topic.
Responsible for conducting and documenting research.	Responsible for sharing substantial information to be incorporated in the manuscript.
Accountable for research content.	Accountable for research content.
Agrees on the journal submission process.	Equally responsible for making decision regarding journal submission.
Responsible for reviewing and agreeing on all corrections made by all authors.	Responsible for reviewing and agreeing on revisions made by all authors.

The confusion of deciding on authorship is very common among researchers. How have you dealt with this confusion? What kind of conflicts arise when deciding on authorship? Let us know in the comments section below!

You can also visit our Q&A forum for frequently asked questions related to different aspects of research writing and publishing answered by our team that comprises subject-matter experts, eminent researchers, and publication experts.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Understanding Ethics

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