

Description

In scientific research, there are often numerous contributors, especially in a university setting where undergraduate and graduate students provide assistance in writing a paper and research. Some projects involve multiple institutions, increasing the number of collaborators. With so many people assisting a project, it can be difficult to know how to assign the authorship. That is why there are certain rules and guidelines to authorship that every scientist should know.

Guidelines for Scientific Authorship

Although there are conventions of scientific authorship, and at times specific guidelines for submission, there is no clear-cut, universal protocol for the inclusion and order of authors. This can lead to an omission of a collaborator, and sometimes to someone being included as an author who did not actually contribute to the research. Some journals list the authors alphabetically, but typically there is a ranking system involved in the order of authors, based on the amount of work each author has contributed.

Order of Authors

The most coveted spot for authorship is that of the lead author as he is typically the cited author and the one to which most of the research is attributed. Being a lead author on an important research project can lead to great distinction. The last author listed is often the one with a senior position that has provided insight, giving him or her more responsibility. Many collaborations and research groups will discuss the authorship guidelines and conventions early on in the project to ensure there are no problems later in the process.

Requirements for Authorship

The requirements for scientific authorship may differ from place to place. Typically, to be considered an author of a paper or study, a person needs to be involved in the scholarship, writing, and/or approval stage of the study or experiment. Scholarship includes being involved in any stage of the research, including conception, design, execution, and analysis. Authorship also includes those who helped to create and revise the manuscript for publication. An author may also include a supervisor who has

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approved the research and manuscript for publication or oversees the project.

The Problems of Falsifying Authorship

Because so many people are involved in scientific research, there are difficulties involved with assigning authorship, which can lead to questions about ethics in scientific authorship. One such problem is coercive authorship, which occurs when more senior members of the team list their name as a lead author when they do not put much work into the actual study.

Another authorship problem occurs when a person is listed as an author out of respect, friendship, or to curry favor, rather than because they have actually assisted in the research, in which case they are known as a guest author. Some authors are omitted, which is known as ghost authors. Although there can be legitimate reasons for these problematic authorship types, they can lead to significant problems.

Being listed as an author can be a defining moment in a researcher's career; however, it also provides significant responsibility. By being associated with a piece of work as an author, that person becomes responsible if anything is found to be wrong or inaccurate in the research. Following proper conventions and guidelines can ensure that a paper's authorship is handled correctly and that the appropriate credit is provided.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Understanding Ethics

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