Description

In the past, authorship lacked a clear set of guidelines and sometimes excluded individuals who had contributed to a paper. The hierarchy of first author, second author, and contributor status was dominant, but also exclusionary. Today, however, the trend is moving toward equal authorship. This is when two or more people are listed as providing the same or similar contribution to a published study.

Authorship Issues Faced by Researchers and Collaborative Teams

Many issues could arise while getting a study published. There might be differences in methods, design, and, most significantly, authorship. This is especially true when working in large groups or across disciplines. Two main issues are: Falsifying Authorship and Ghost Authors

- The Problems of Falsifying Authorship

The lack of clear authorship guidelines leads to questions about ethics. One problem is when senior members of a team want to list their name as a lead author when they did not do much work. This is presumed because of their high position. It cements their status as leaders in a field while overshadowing the work done by graduate students or scientists at the early stages of their career.

- “Guest/Ghost Authors”

Another authorship problem is when listed an individual is listed as a guest author out of respect or to attract more readers to a study. This is often referred to as “guest authors.” The problem with this is that it can lead to other researchers being excluded from the author list, or take away the opportunity for recognization of their work. This leads to ‘ghost authorship issues’.

Guidelines for Attributing Authorship

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Despite some journals having their methods for listing authors, there are no set guidelines for attributing authorship in the scientific community. Fortunately, the trends in recognizing equal authorship and contributorship are changing. Individual who want to set new directions for equal authorship is focusing on two key areas: Requirements for Authorship and the Order of Authors

Requirements for Authorship

Academics who want to establish guidelines for authorship look at three main factors: research, writing, and approval.

1. **The research** includes being involved in the development of a thesis and its main ideas, the conception, design, and execution of an experiment, and the overall analysis.
2. **Writing** includes individuals who help create everything from the abstract to tables to the analysis. It also contains editors who revise the manuscript for publication.
3. **The approval** includes mentors and supervisors who have approved the research and who oversee the project.

Order of Authors

Of course, all academics want to see themselves listed in the spot of the lead author. This spot is for the individual, for doing most of the research and also becomes the most cited author. The last author listed is often the one with a senior position. This individual has provided direction on the study. This also usually means this individual has taken on 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.

Gretchen L. Kiser Proposes Need for New Guidelines

Gretchen L. Kiser, Executive Director of the Research Development Office (RDO) at the University of California San Francisco, asks, in direct and straightforward terms: “What if we completely blow up how we attribute authorship?” She wants to eliminate the distinctions of first authors, last authors, and the standard way that authorship and contributorship arrangement. This, she says, could interrupt the negative feedback loop and lead to more innovation through collaboration.

So, how is Dr. Kiser working toward achieving these goals? First, she is doing tremendous work through the Research Development Office that she leads. She and her team are bringing together researchers in different fields to encourage innovative thinking and new approaches to scientific study. They offer much needed financial and logistical support for researchers to imagine, design, and develop further studies.

The work done by Dr. Kiser and her team has seen much success. One example is the “speed-networking” events at UCSF. One example is an event that brought together neurologist Dena Dubal and psychologist Aric Prather. This led to a study that revealed a link between chronic psychological stress and lower levels of a longevity hormone. That led to a published study that showed an association between chronic psychological stress and lower levels of a longevity hormone.

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Alex Holcombe Suggests CRediT System

Through his experiences, Alex Holcombe, a professor of psychology at the University of Sydney, also sees the need for serious authorship reform. As a Ph.D. student, his skills as a programmer were in demand. However, despite the work he would do, he would not receive recognition as an author or contributor. His superiors, mostly high-ranking faculty, would be the ones who received the honor. Unfortunately, even twenty years later, he sees nothing has changed.

Professor Holcombe is a supporter of the CRediT system. The CRrediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) system helps in quantification. It recognizes 14 types of contribution, including conceptualization, methodology, software, project administration, and data curation. Besides, more than two dozen journal publishers use CRediT for some of their journals. The main benefit of the CRediT system is that it recognizes a broader range of contributions. This helps researchers and scientists at all levels.

Overall, this will help in many ways:

1. Research institutes will have better information for hiring scientists and researchers.
2. Consider a higher number of grant applicants.
3. Equal distribution of Scientific resources.

Gretchen L. Kiser: Key Solutions in the Right Direction

According to Gretchen Kiser, a cultural shift needs to recognize and reward scientists who make their work useful to others. The most significant step in fixing this problem is to get rid of ordered author lists. “By developing author contribution taxonomies and narratives, we have already acknowledged the need to reflect the multifaceted nature of authorship,” Kiser says.

Applying old authorship models in a time where innovation is continuously progressing will not work anymore. Kiser asks: “Can we imagine an author attribution method that would use cutting-edge computational tools similar to those being applied to scientific research itself? A tool that gives credit where credit is due?” Yes, we can. By acknowledging innovation in research, we must acknowledge innovating ways to make recognition more diverse and inclusive. This will create a more efficient, collaborative research environment.

Have you come across authorship issues? If so, how did you manage it? Share your thoughts and comments in the comments section below.

Category

1. Reporting Research

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