

Guest Authors: Think Twice Before You Sign On

Author

Enago Academy

Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/guest-authors-in-research-paper/>

It's fairly common for an author to invite a better known researcher to be a coauthor on a paper. Although the [distinguished researcher sometimes makes a valuable contribution to the paper's content](#), he often serves as a "guest author," donating nothing more than his name, recognition, and prestige to give the paper a better chance for acceptance in a major journal. This seems like a win-win for both parties; the lesser author gets his paper accepted and the distinguished author adds another publication to his record. Nevertheless, guest authorship is a bad practice which can damage an author's reputation.

An Author Should Write His Paper

Charles Nemeroff, former Editor-in-Chief of *Neuropsychopharmacology*, joined seven other [academic coauthors](#) in attaching his name on a paper which gave a glowing review of a medical device, with Nemeroff listed as the main author. In fact, the paper was produced by a professional writer hired by the company that made the device and whose name was not listed as an author. There were other controversial aspects of the paper—all academic coauthors had undisclosed financial ties to the company, but Nemeroff's willingness to rubber stamp someone else's paper seemed like a shoddy use of his reputation. He stepped down as Editor-in-Chief soon after the story broke.

Rubber Stamps Bounce Back

If a guest author only [skims through a paper](#) before adding his name he may regret it. The paper may be weak, with poorly designed experiments and shaky conclusions. Reviewers swayed by a coauthor's name may put aside their reservations and approve a bad paper but the truth will come out eventually. When it does the guest author will end up with a paper that he is not proud of on his record.

An Author Should Read His Paper

Twelve years ago Jan Schön, a physicist at Bell Labs, was riding high. Barely thirty years old, he had published a string of papers claiming breakthroughs in the area of organic semiconductors. He received several major research awards, all of which were rescinded when it was found that his claims were bogus. Readers noticed that different papers had the same graphs labeled as different experiments. Schön had several coauthors on these papers. Did they not read the papers they put their names on? Evidently not. The chance to have their name forever cited on a groundbreaking paper was too good to pass up.

Welcomed Guests

There is a place for invited coauthors. A brilliant experimentalist may be weak in theoretical aspects of a problem and might invite a researcher strong in this area to collaborate. Such teamwork gave us the Woodward-Hoffman rules for cycloaddition reactions. There is nothing wrong with having an invited coauthor if he makes a significant contribution to a paper. But there is no place for a guest author who is just along for the ride.

For more information on the cases cited see the following links:

<http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/24267/title/Journal-editor-quits-in-conflict-scandal/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Hendrik_Schön#Allegations_and_investigation

Cite this article

Enago Academy, Guest Authors: Think Twice Before You Sign On. Enago Academy. 2016/06/24. <https://www.enago.com/academy/guest-authors-in-research-paper/>