

The Perfect Research Co-author: How Do I Find You?

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Multi-author papers are on the rise in several academic disciplines. Science done in large teams widens the scope of knowledge sharing. Collaboration and co-authoring with other researchers have several benefits. It makes the research more efficient and productive as every co-author brings his/her expertise to the bench! Moreover, cross-cultural and cross-functional team members are likely to infuse greater creativity and insights. Having more co-authors facilitates the sharing of workload and distribution of specific roles within the team. A diverse research group working on one project helps in increasing the outreach of your findings. In addition, research teams having co-authors with gender and ethnic diversity provide a wealth of diverse perspectives!

Collaborative science comes with a lot of responsibility too! Partnering with co-authors can be challenging from manifold standpoints. Co-authors may have different attitudes about the study design and workflow, have different levels of commitment for different tasks, or may have conflicting writing practices. A research project may derail or fail if not coordinated competently. To get the most out of your partnership, you need a strategic approach!

What to Look for in a Potential Co-author?

To [facilitate successful and rewarding partnerships](#), it is paramount to first have an honest look at your strengths and weaknesses. Knowing where you lack can help you find co-authors who have strengths in those zones.

Complementary skill-sets

Is your potential co-author good in ideating and designing experimental work, whereas you are adept at using statistical tools? Does your prospective collaborator have a rich experience in your subject field helping you troubleshoot problems? Having a co-author with complementary strengths ensures greater gains due to the division of labor and field specialization. It encourages new ways of thinking and different resources.

Work ethics

Is the co-author known to have good work ethics? Does he reply to your emails in a timely manner? Is he/she good at keeping promises? Is your co-author willing to devote the time and energy required for conception, design, analysis of research work? Another quality that you should look for is whether your co-author challenges you to do your best!

Career stage and discipline

Diversify your co-author list with scholars from different career stages and disciplines. Diversity is integral to enhancing overall work quality. Both junior and senior scholars bring their own strengths to the table. Having co-authors from different disciplines facilitates having an 'outside' perspective in your field of study. Furthermore, it ensures your work reaches different audiences. Bibliometric analysis reveals that articles published with authors having greater ethnic diversity garner greater citation counts!

Writing skills

Identify an author who has good writing skills. Before negotiating the terms for co-authorship, ask for a sample work/previous publications to determine whether the concerned person is a good fit for your study.

Co-author traits

Although knowledge and experience are essential qualities, it is far more important that your potential co-author enjoys working in your field of research. A co-author must be motivated and must commit both time and effort to meet the conventional project guidelines.

Furthermore, the co-author must have a positive reputation in the academic arena. A reputed and renowned co-author who is respected for his/her contribution to science is always a great choice! It helps in [strengthening the authenticity and credibility](#) of your work.

How to Find Diverse Co-authors?

- Tap your mentors/supervisors for [co-authorship opportunities](#).
- Shoot an email with an idea or two to scholars you met at conferences. Follow-up with them to know if they are interested in collaborating with you.
- Reach out to potential co-authors through social networking sites such as ORCID, LinkedIn, Twitter, and ResearchGate.
- Use search engines and databases to gain insights into the most prolific, highly cited authors in your field.
- Establishing co-authorship with highly cited and influential scientists is advantageous, especially for early-career researchers.

The Tricky Bits to Make the Collaboration Work

There are challenges at various levels, including the provision of fair credit, acceptance of distinct working styles, and clear communication. Achieving consensus is vital for the success of any research project involving multiple authors. To make your research both fun and rewarding, it is important to inculcate values such as patience, empathy, inquisitiveness, and openness. Inappropriate work ethics or selection of an incompatible research partner may lead to a delay or premature termination of the project. Therefore, to ensure timely and satisfactory completion of the research project, one needs to be cautious while collaborating for research and writing. Let us look at [things that you can do differently to make co-authorship work](#).

Authorship roles

- Have an open and frank discussion about individual goals, interests, roles, responsibilities, and needs.
- Determine authorship goals at the very beginning of the research project.
- Jointly decide authorship criteria and explicitly define the tasks worthy of authorship/contributorship. This ensures that when it is time to publish, [differences over authorship are far less likely](#).
- Set clear goals about every co-author's job and ensure work is allocated in a practical and unbiased manner.

Appreciate the differences

- Maximize demographic and intellectual diversity to optimize research output.
- Be aware of co-author's expectations, cultural norms, and ethical values, especially for co-authors from a diverse ethnicity.

Believe in teamwork

- Practice co-creation of ideas and strategies, rather than pushing your own thoughts.

Communication

- Communication is the key! Be open and transparent throughout the collaborative journey to avoid any conflicts or misunderstandings.
- Keep all the co-authors informed about the progress and the snags equally.
- Discuss timelines for the research. Create a realistic plan.
- Keep written records of all the discussions and agreements. Conflicts are easier to settle when you have collaborative agreements on paper.

Give credit where it is due

- Ensure fair and equitable distribution of resources.
- Give fair credit to researchers regardless of gender, rank, ethnicity, career stage, etc.

How was your experience while finding compatible co-authors? Do let us know your thoughts on this in the comments section below!

Cite this article

Dr. Shweta Murudkar, The Perfect Research Co-author: How Do I Find You?. Enago Academy. 2020/11/02. <https://www.enago.com/academy/perfect-research-co-author-how-do-i-find-you/>