

Determining Authorship and Resolving Disputes

Authorship confers credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications. Authorship also implies responsibility and accountability for published work. The following guidelines are intended to ensure that contributors who have made substantive intellectual contributions to a paper are given credit as authors, but also that contributors credited as authors understand their role in taking responsibility and being accountable for what is published.

Authorship determination

In all cases, authors should follow the generally accepted practices for their discipline in determining authorship credit, including the proper acknowledgement of affiliations and support, both foreign and/or domestic, and ensuring all sponsor guidelines are followed.

The following general criteria are in accordance with the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and are included in the Office of Research's [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) training as general guidelines for authorship determination for manuscripts (e.g., peer reviewed journal publications, books, conference proceedings, reviews, etc.).

1. Substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
2. Drafting the article or reviewing it critically for important intellectual content
3. Ability to explain and defend the study in public or scholarly settings

Authors who meet the above criteria should be provided the opportunity to review the final version prior to publication.

Collaboration and Implementation

The lead scholar leading a collaborative endeavor should develop a transparent approach to determining authorship. If such standards are documented in writing, they should be made available to all collaborators and discussed at the beginning of the collaboration. Researchers and other groups should discuss the criteria for authorship, including the future direction of the project, as early as practical and throughout the course of their work. Although the lead scholar should initiate these discussions, any collaborator should raise questions or seek clarity at any point throughout the course of the collaboration. Roles may change during the course of a

project and involved parties should revisit authorship and authorship order, if appropriate, whenever significant changes occur.

When collaborating with Indigenous communities authors should incorporate [The Care Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#) and provide evidence of the care taken towards engagement with Indigenous communities, including appropriate attribution, and ideally Indigenous authorship.

Authorship order

The author order on a manuscript varies between disciplines. In certain disciplines, the author order is alphabetical. In many fields, the author order indicates the magnitude of contribution, with the first author adding the most value and the senior author appearing last. The senior author, like all other authors, should meet all criteria for authorship. The senior author is usually a senior member of the research team who served as the driving force behind the concept, organized the project, and provided guidance throughout the project.

Corresponding Author

Corresponding author is the one individual who takes primary responsibility for communication with the journal during the manuscript submission, peer-review, and publication process. The corresponding author typically ensures that all the journal's administrative requirements, such as providing details of authorship, ethics committee approval, clinical trial registration documentation, and disclosures of relationships and activities are properly completed and reported, although these duties may be delegated to one or more co-authors. The corresponding author should be available throughout the submission and peer-review process to respond to editorial queries in a timely way, and should be available after publication to respond to critiques of the work and cooperate with any requests from the journal for data or additional information should questions about the paper arise after publication.

The corresponding author is also responsible for making sure that all potential authors of the paper are contacted and have the opportunity to help draft the article or review it critically for important intellectual content and have the opportunity to give final approval of the version to be published.

Non-Author Contributors

Contributors who meet fewer than all 4 of the above criteria for authorship should not be listed as authors, but they should be acknowledged.

Examples of activities that alone that do not qualify as authorship:

1. Acquisition of funding
2. General supervision of a research group or general administrative support
3. Writing assistance, technical editing, language editing, and proofreading.

Contributions that do not justify authorship may be acknowledged individually or together as a group under a single heading (e.g. "Clinical Investigators" or "Participating Investigators"), and their contributions should be specified (e.g., "served as scientific advisors," "critically reviewed the study proposal," "collected data," "provided and cared for study patients," "participated in writing or technical editing of the manuscript").

Violations

The following are examples of acts that may violate these guidelines:

- **Intentional exclusion of a person as author** who meets the criteria defined above in the Authorship determination section.
- **Acceptance or ascription of an honorary authorship.** Honorary (guest, courtesy, or prestige) authorship is granting authorship out of appreciation or respect for an individual, or in the belief that the expert standing of the honored person will increase the likelihood of publication, credibility, or status of the work even in the absence of significant intellectual contribution.
- **Acceptance or ascription of a gift authorship.** Gift authorship is credit, offered from a sense of obligation, tribute, or dependence, within the context of an anticipated benefit, to an individual who has not appropriately contributed to the work.
- **Acceptance or ascription of a ghost authorship.** Ghost authorship is the failure to identify as an author someone who has made substantial contributions to the research or writing of a manuscript thus meriting authorship or allowing significant editorial control of a publication by an unnamed party, which may constitute a real or perceived conflict of interest that should be disclosed.

It is important to note that authorship disputes do not usually constitute research misconduct, and disputes over authorship use a different resolution process than allegations of misconduct. (See MSU's [Research Misconduct policy](#) for more information.).

Dispute resolution

It is the overall goal of the University to resolve concerns or problems at the lowest possible level. To this end, prior to initiating a formal authorship dispute with the Office of Research

Compliance, individuals feeling aggrieved by an individual's actions are encouraged to use the following resources for attempting resolution of authorship and authorship order disputes:

- Corresponding author and principal investigator. If a resolution is unable to be achieved between the parties involved the department head must be notified who will, at their discretion, involve the college dean, if necessary.
- If the dispute includes a graduate student and the dispute reaches the college dean, the college dean is encouraged to consult with the graduate dean.
- If the dispute includes external MSU collaborators, the MSU individual should work with their respective department chair, dean, and the Office of Research Compliance.

Unresolved disputes

If authors are unable to reach a resolution using the guidelines provided above, the matter may be brought to the attention of the Research Integrity Officer, in the Office of Research Compliance, and department head.

If the Research Integrity Officer determines that the author list did not follow the appropriate authorship guidelines, they will inform the authors and department head and request that the author list be updated. The authors can appeal the determination to the Vice President for Research within 15 days. If no appeal is filed, or if the appeal is not successful, then the authors will be provided 10 days to request that the author list be updated. If the author list has not been updated in 10 days, the Research Integrity Officer will communicate their findings with the editors of the journal to which the work has been submitted.

Resources

<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>

<https://www.nature.com/nature-portfolio/editorial-policies/authorship>

<https://www.elsevier.com/authors/policies-and-guidelines/credit-author-statement>