



Annals of Internal Medicine
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Authorship: Medical A Journal's Perspective

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Author: an individual who has made *substantive intellectual* contributions to a published work

Why Authorship Matters

- Academic, social, and financial implications
 - Readers want to know who did what
 - Identifies who is accountable for the integrity of the work
-

Authorship: Fundamental Principles

- All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship
 - All those who qualify should be listed
 - Each author should have participated sufficiently to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content
-

ICMJE Criteria for Authorship

Authors should meet the following 3 criteria:

- Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
- Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content
- Final approval of the version to be published

ICMJE:

Contributions that Don't Alone Make an Author

- Acquisition of funding
- Collection of data
- Referral of patients
- Provision of study samples
- General supervision of the research group

ICMJE: Acknowledgements

- Acknowledgements should list contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship and state what they did
- Can list groups of persons who have contributed under a heading such as "clinical investigators" or "participating investigators," and describe what they did...
- Provide written permission from those acknowledged



- The purpose of contributorship disclosures is to have each author/contributor personally affirm his or her role, to disclose publicly to readers what each author did, and to gain from authors “public responsibility for content.”
 - While the ICMJE criteria provide guidance about types of contributions that characterize authors, it is ultimately the role of researchers themselves and not the editors to decide which individuals have contributed sufficiently to earn the designation “author.”
-

Why editors can't determine authorship/contributorship



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

“Editors cannot police author or contributor listing for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors.”

Council on Publication Ethics (COPE)

Signs that might indicate authorship problems

- Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments
- Changes are made by somebody not on the author list (*check Word document properties to see who made the changes but bear in mind there may be an innocent explanation for this, e.g. using a shared computer, or a secretary making changes*)
- Document properties show the manuscript was drafted by someone not on the author list or properly acknowledged (*but see above*)
- Impossibly prolific author e.g. of review articles / opinion pieces (check also for redundant / overlapping publication) (*this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the author's name*)
- Several similar review articles / editorials / opinion pieces have been published under different author names (*this may be detected by a Medline or Google search using the article title or key words*)
- Role missing from list of contributors (e.g. it appears that none of the named authors were responsible for analysing the data or drafting the paper)
- Unfeasibly long or short author list (e.g. a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomized trial with a single author)
- Industry-funded study with no authors from sponsor company (*this may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the protocol may help determine the role of employees -- see Gøtzsche et al. and commentary by Wager*)

Journal Policies on “Contributorship”

- An increasing number of biomedical journals collect and publish information about author contributions
 - Most do not “police” this information, simply report what the authors say
 - Some ask for the identification of a guarantor
-

Types of Author Contributions

- conception & design
 - analysis & interpretation of data
 - provision of study materials or patients
 - collection & assembly of data
 - statistical expertise
 - administrative/technical/logistical support
 - obtaining funding
 - drafting of the article
 - critical revision for important intellectual content
 - final approval of the article
 - guarantor
 - other
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Guarantor

- person(s) who take responsibility for the integrity of the work as a whole, from inception to published article
 - some journals ask for and publish identification of the guarantor
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Tipping the Balance of Screening Mammography: A Comparative Modeling Study

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See Also:

[Risk-Based Mammography Screening: A Comparative Modeling Study](#)

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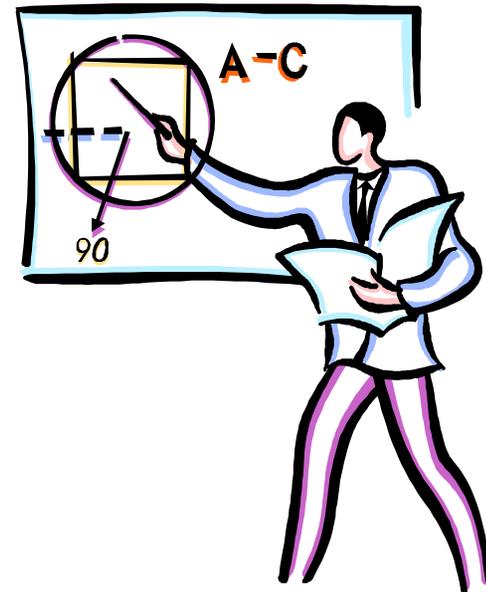
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Documenting contributions does not solve everything... but it helps

- First author of 2003 paper comparing Vioxx vs. NSAID, signed statement attesting to contributions to study conception, design, conduct, and reporting
 - In 2005, NY Times questioned appropriate reporting of cardiac events in 2003 paper
 - Author admitted that he never saw the data, only made suggestions on an already written paper sponsor had written
-

The Key Question Authors Should Ask Themselves...

Would I be willing and able to stand by the content of this paper if someone questioned its integrity?



Contemporary Definition of Authorship

- Authors are individuals identified by the research group to have made substantial contributions to the reported work and agree to be accountable for these contributions.
 - In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work he or she has done, an author should be able to identify which of their co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work.
 - In addition, an author should have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors. All authors should review and approve the final manuscript.
-

Avoiding Authorship Battles

- Discuss individual contributor roles and authorship ahead of time (before writing and, ideally, before beginning the work)
 - Document consensus reached in above discussions
 - Review contributions as work progresses and modify accordingly
 - All contributors sign off before submitting the manuscript for publication
 - If adding or deleting a contributor document rationale and consent from all
-

A Few Questions to Ponder

- In scholarly communication, what's the difference (if any) between being an author and being a writer?
 - What level of contribution qualifies a person as an "author" as opposed to a "writer" or other type of contributor?
 - Can someone not write a word and still qualify to be an "author" of a scholarly article?
 - Can an individual draft the entire manuscript and still not qualify to be an "author" of a scholarly publication?
-