

**Authorship: an important and
difficult question**

Abuja, 25 July, 2008

Kerstin Stenius

Why Authorship is Important

- Certification of public responsibility for truth of a publication
- Equitable assignment of credit
- Productivity, promotion and prestige

Authorship Problems

- Failure to involve potential collaborators
- Failure to credit contributors
- Undeserved (gift) authorship
- Poor judgment about relative contributions
- Ambiguity about process

Conventions for Assigning Authorship

- Alphabetical order
- Reverse alphabetical order
- Relative contributions
 - main author first
- Corporate authorship
- Contributorship

Definition of Authorship

All persons named as authors should have made a major contribution to the work reported and be prepared to take public responsibility for its contents (in proportion to the credit they claim on the author list).

- *Responsibility* means the ability and willingness to defend the content of the paper if it is challenged by readers.
- *Public* means that authors are willing to carry out this responsibility in a published defense, such as a signed letter to the editor
- *Content* means not simply packages of data but also the conceptual framework on which they are hung: the justification for a study or clinical observations; the basis for the study design; methods for collection of valid data: the analysis and interpretation of the data; and the logic that led to the conclusions.

ISAJE (2002) Guidelines on Authorship Credits

- Early agreement on the precise roles of the contributors and collaborators, and on matters of authorship and publication, is advised (COPE 2001).
- The award of authorship should balance intellectual contributions to the conception, design, analysis and writing of the study against the collection of data and other routine work. If there is no task that can reasonably be attributed to a particular individual, then that individual should not be credited with authorship (COPE 2001).
- All authors must take public responsibility for the content of their paper. The multidisciplinary nature of many research studies can make this difficult, but this can be resolved by the disclosure of individual contributions (COPE 2001).
- Authors should not allow their name to be used on a piece of work merely to add credibility to the content (COPE 2001).

Authorship: ICMJE (1985, 2003)

Consensus Statement

- Only those in a position to take public responsibility for the work
- All authors should make substantive contributions to each of the following:
 - Conception and design OR acquisition of data OR interpretation
 - Drafting of article
 - Final approval of published version

Authorship guidelines proposed by American Psychological Association

Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed. Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. **Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement. Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's doctoral dissertation. Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate.**

From section 8.12 American Psychological Association (2002)

Special Issues for Students and Postdocs

- Publication pressure
- Ignorance of publication process and rules of the game
- Power relations
- Timeliness of publication
- Financial remuneration for work
- Need for departmental policies,
 - e.g. authorship criteria, whom to consult, etc.

Practical Steps to Determine Authorship

- Recognize group authorship is a social process
- Establish expectations for openness, fairness and ethicality
- Choose a leader
- Discuss authorship at each stage:
“Who did what and how much”
Lafollette, 1992

Planning Stage

- Senior members develop outline, timetable, list of potential co-authors (based on actual and expected substantive contributions)
- Distribute outline with message that: (a) actual authorship depends on contributions, effort and follow-through; (b) contributions will be reviewed periodically
- Distribute relevant policies and publications
- Organize formal meeting to discuss timetable and responsibilities

Checklist for Making an Inventory of Major and Minor Contributions to a Scientific Paper

Instructions:

Use the checklist to describe your contributions to the project to date. Under each item you have checked, describe the nature of your contribution, the amount of effort you put into it (e.g., hours, days, months), and whether your contribution fulfilled all of the requirements for that task or some of the requirements (e.g., in collaboration with others you wrote part of the paper, or collected part of the data).

- Writing final version of paper (1)
- Design of methodology or experimental design (2)
- Interpretation of data (3)
- Collection of data (4), including follow-up data
- Coordinated study (5) by assigning responsibilities and tasks
- Clinical analysis or management (6)
- Statistical analysis of data (7)
- Conception (planning meetings, drafting of research proposal, etc.)
- Review of literature
- Obtained funding or other resources
- Assembling the project team
- Training of personnel
- Supervision of personnel
- Human (or animal) subjects approvals
- Advised on design or analysis
- Writing the research protocol

(Continued)

Checklist for Making an Inventory of Major and Minor Contributions to a Scientific Paper

Performed randomization or matching

Economic analysis of data

Managed data

Provision of technical services, e.g., coding questionnaires, laboratory analyses

Provision or recruitment of patients

Provision of materials or facilities

Present and defend findings in a public forum

Writing draft of paper

Submitting report for publication

Responding to reviewers' comments

Other activity or service (describe)

First items identified by Yank and Rennie (1999) in a content analysis of articles according to the most frequently mentioned contributions to authorship.

Drafting Stage

- Circulate first draft for comments
- Remind possible authors of rights and responsibilities
- Ask all possible authors to describe major and minor contributions (use checklist) as well as effort and follow-through
- Discuss who qualifies for authorship
- Acknowledge non-substantive contributions

Finalization Stage

- Review contributions
- Review order of authors
- Make sure that all authors read and comment on final copy

SUMMARY:

Prevention of Authorship Problems

- Early agreement on the precise roles of the contributors and collaborators, and on matters of authorship and publication.
- The lead author should periodically review the status of authorship credits within a designated working group by having open discussions of substantive contributions with all prospective collaborators.
- *Authorship guidelines like those developed by ISAJE should be distributed to, and discussed with, all potential collaborators on a manuscript.*