

Co-Authorship

When not handled deliberately and with open communication, authorship can be a politically fraught process. In this document, I'll try to outline some common understandings, etiquette, and pitfalls about authorship. I'll also address a few authorship guidelines for your degree-based work (e.g. thesis, comprehensive exam if publishable, course work if publishable). These are all just guidelines and points for consideration. They will need to be adapted for each individual circumstance. These principles apply not just to manuscripts submitted for publication, but also presentations, abstracts, book chapters etc.

Authorship can be a politically tricky situation to navigate. Start the conversation early and include all interested parties. When the co-authors are confirmed, as first author your responsibility is to keep them in the loop- communicate expectations for contributions and ensure that all co-authors have adequate time to offer feedback, approval of versions. The first author should notify all co-authors of the progress of the work, including circulating final citations (of presentations, publications) when available.

Who counts as an author?

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has released guidelines about authorship (link included in the Resources section at the end of this document). These guidelines have been adopted by many health related journals. They are:

The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND

- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

If a person meets one or more of these criteria but not all four, they should be acknowledged as contributors. The ICMJE provides several examples of contributions which (alone) do not merit authorship. For example, writing assistance, technical editing, assistance with recruitment of participants, caring for study patients etc.

My rough rule of thumb is that intellectual contributions must be made at multiple stages of the research process to qualify for authorship. A person who participates by collecting data or doing analysis intellectually directed by someone else does not qualify for authorship.

When you participate in a research project that is not part of your thesis, be sure to discuss authorship with the Principal Investigator at the beginning of the project. You might ask:

- Is there an opportunity for me to be recognized as a co-author on publications arising from this project?
- What types of contributions will be necessary?
- What is the relation between these contributions and the paid work I am contracted to do?
- How will authorship order be negotiated?
- Who will adjudicate authorship order, contributions etc. if a conflict arises or clarity is needed?

What order are authors listed in?

First, it's important to understand that authorship conventions and priorities vary by discipline. For example, in some disciplines, authors are listed alphabetically, while in others the order of

authorship is very important. Some disciplines value single authored papers, some do not expect that any of your work will be authored by only one person. One of the most controversial disciplinary authorship conventions in Health Policy and HPE is the “senior author” position. In medicine, the senior supervising author is typically listed last. This person is often (although not always) the Corresponding Author for the paper. In many Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines, the last author is the person who has made the smallest contribution. A heavily involved supervisor/senior author would typically be listed as the second author. For social scientists working in medicine, it is often unclear where the senior author should be listed.

The CanChild research centre at McMaster has produced a [comprehensive document](#) that outlines guidelines for determining author order. They suggest that the Principal Investigator has an important role in both keeping track of all the potential contributors, making these people aware of opportunities to contribute, and initiating discussions about authorship order.

Ideally, the first author of a paper is determined at the beginning of the project. This person can then take on a more substantial leadership role in the project, and help initiate other conversations about authorship and delegate work and responsibility accordingly.

Authorship of student work

You are the first author of work emanating from your thesis. Typically, your supervisor and committee members are eligible co-authors. They are intimately involved in the conception and design of the project, typically participate in analysis and provide formative feedback on all aspects of the project. It is less typical in our field of work that others are co-authors, but there are circumstances in which other people not on the thesis committee may join individual projects. Not all committee members may be heavily involved in each of your projects and not all may merit co-authorship on each project, but this is a good rule of thumb to start with. As your supervisor, I am happy to help you initiate a discussion about authorship with your committee members about your thesis work.

If you produce publishable work outside of your thesis, your supervisor and committee members may not be eligible co-authors. For example, the comprehensive exam independent study in the

HRM PhD may be an additional piece of publishable work that is separate from your thesis and which your supervisor and committee members may not be involved in. However, your ISP supervisor is a likely senior author for that piece.

Occasionally, a student may write a paper as part of course work that is publishable. If the work was produced for course credit it should be the sole intellectual product of the student. Unless the course instructor has been heavily involved in the conception and production of this work (highly unusual for work produced for course credit), that person does not need to be invited as an author. An alternate scenario is that the student produces the work submitted for course credit independently, but after submitting it for course credit begins to work in conjunction with others to re-format the work for publication. Whether or not the others qualify for co-authorship will depend on the extent of the revision and the intellectual contribution of the other parties.

Responsibilities and Etiquette

It's the responsibility of the first author to:

- Keep co-authors informed about the progress of the work through review
- Circulate complete citations for inclusion on the CVs of all co-authors

These principles apply to all types of knowledge products, e.g. publications, presentations, book chapters, reports etc. Sometimes work will get presented in multiple venues. It's hard for co-authors to keep track of this, and very helpful when the presenter sends the complete citation after each presentation.

It should go without saying, but every person listed as a co-author must approve the work that is submitted or disseminated. This is typically easy to remember for manuscripts, but sometimes gets forgotten with abstracts or presentations. If you submit an abstract, everyone whose name is on that abstract should be provided reasonable opportunity to offer feedback and approval for the work submitted. Before the presentation, each co-author should be provided reasonable opportunity to review and offer comment on the presentation (slides or poster) before it is presented.

Resources

- 1) The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has many helpful guidelines, particularly: [How to handle authorship disputes: a guide for new researchers](#)
- 2) Science Magazine – [Conventions of Scientific Authorship](#)
- 3) CanChild – [Guidelines on authorship of abstracts, presentations and papers](#)
- 4) International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) – [Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors](#)