

Authorship

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w/ material from D. Brown

Journal articles: our main way of communicating scientific results

Why authorship matters: Allocating credit

- 1) Recognition by peers, respect, glory, prizes...
- 2) Getting a job
- 3) Getting promoted
- 4) Getting funding

Goals of this presentation

1) Know the rules; know the problems.

its usually not about leaving someone out, its usually about including some who shouldn't be there...

2) Realize the gray areas; think about them.

3) Pre-think some situations that come up regularly.

4) Ideas about how to handle these situations.

- Expose; many fishy requests dry up when exposed to the light of day.
- Use the institution. Naively suggesting that maybe “gosh, I don’t know, it seems to me to not meet the requirements, but you may be right, maybe we should have a phone call together with someone in the ombudsman’s office about it.”

5) Think about the pressures that push people to abuse...

- What is motivating others.
- Pressure on you.

Why is it a problem?



Guidelines

1) International Committee of Medical Journal Editors
(IMCJE)

(<http://www.icmje.org/>)

2) Harvard Medical School: Google: “harvard medical school authorship guidelines”

Substantial contributions to:

From ICMJE

- 1) Conception/design, or data acquisition, or analysis/interpretation
- 2) Drafting or revising for intellectual content.
- 3) Final approval of manuscript.
- 4) Agreement to be held accountable for the work.

Author if and only if the logical AND of these is met...

All of them!

It's a higher bar than most think...

Doesn't make the cut:

- 1) Technical advice, a reagent or tool, patient data, funding....
- 2) Providing technical personnel/students to perform work.
- 3) Routine data collection/lab work.
- 4) General management/supervision.

Its about the intellectual contribution...

Boiling it down: what is important...

- 1) The intellectual parts of the study.
- 2) The intellectual parts of writing the paper.
- 3) Being central enough so that it makes sense that you take responsibility for the work (good and bad)...

Its about the intellectual contribution...

Common situations

Big wheeler-dealer Prof. collaborating from another institution knows about the study, maybe one of the authors came from his/her lab, but otherwise could not describe what was done/found; insists on being an author.

Say: “Please enumerate which contributions to *Conception/design, or data acquisition, or analysis/interpretation* were yours and I will check with my institutional ombudsman to see if I can get you added...”

Common situations

Big wheeler-dealer clinical Prof. helped provide access to a patient population but little else. Says “I own disease X around here...”

Say: “please enumerate your contributions to *Conception/design, or data acquisition, or analysis/interpretation* were yours and I will check with my institutional ombudsman to see if I can get you added...”

- Always come at it from the point of view of wanting to genuinely do the right thing...
- Its not you vs him. Its you and him trying to figure out what is right, possibly enrolling institutional resources to help.

Common situations

The type who over-values contribution... e.g. R.A. or tech. who helped with data collection.

Grey area: Was it a “substantial contribution”? Did they meet the other requirements?

My test: could they explain the study to someone? If not, then they probably didn't make a substantial intellectual contribution, and can't fully take responsibility for the study (criteria #4).

If they fail these tests, email them a copy of the author guidelines and ask them to explain how they fulfill the requirements...

Be aware that techs have different career metrics...

Common situations

The quid-pro quo; post-doc 1 to post-doc 2: “we are doing similar type experiments, put me on yours and I will put you on mine...”

Agreeing will cause minor bump to both CVs, but overall dilution of your own solid work... or worse if you get the reputation for not being a real part of the work on your CV...

What to do: “yes there is a lot of similarity. If we would have realized that from the beginning then we could have played a more central role in the concept/design stage. We have barely been listening to each others presentations, I don't think it's a central enough intellectual role to qualify.”

Common situations

Reclusive genius has brilliant idea over coffee that gives rise to the study...

This can constitute a substantial contribution to conception and design. If s/he sticks with it and meets the manuscript prep requirements and accountability requirement; add'em...

The amount of time spent is not part of the calculation. If they can substantially contribute with 10 seconds of insight; more power to them...

Corollary: “if you can write great poetry in 5 minutes, don’t tell anyone...”

Common situations

The work that took forever to get done... Original student/postdoc did a lot, but is long gone...

This can constitute a substantial contribution to conception and design. If s/he sticks with it and meets the manuscript prep requirements and accountability requirement; add'em...

The amount of time gone by is not part of the calculation.

Honorary authors: having too many is more likely than having too few.

“Honorary” ; authorship awarded out of respect/friendship/ to promote status...

...not just for Nobel Laureates anymore...

Don't be tempted to do this, senior people worth impressing won't be impressed...

Be careful about being added yourself! You do not want to be an author on a paper that gets dragged through an institutional or NIH ethical or scientific fraud panel.

The kind of authors who might try to use authorship this way are likely the kind that might skirt other guidelines...

Legacy authors: having too many is more likely than having too few.

“Legacy” ; authorship is awarded to someone who made an initial tool/device/software... and want authorship from all in the lab that use it *in perpetuity*.

Must have a substantial contribution to the project. Has to meet the manuscript prep requirements...

The tool is in the public domain once published...

Their work was not intended for your study.

Do they meet the “can they explain it” test?

What to say: “yes, your tool was valuable, I am happy to acknowledge you and cite your paper on the tool. We have thought about it and have consulted with the Harvard authorship guidelines and are certain that without substantial participation in the design/conceptualization/analysis and without a role in the manuscript preparation, that this is the right way to acknowledge your contribution. Let me know if you want to have a phone call on this with the Ombudsman...

Licensing authorship (!)

“License agreement” ; authorship is awarded to someone who requires it as part of a license agreement to use a piece of software, reagent, etc. Its not in the public domain, its copywrited... They literally put it in the legal agreement.

Work with Innovations office to reject these agreements. They have to have a more substantial role than just mailing you something...

What to do: Agreeing that you need to cite their paper is okay, maybe a good compromise... Blame the institutions; the lawyers at Partners Innovations will not approve this license...

The Core facility authorship mill

Scientist running a Core service is awarded authorship for their role in providing Core services.*

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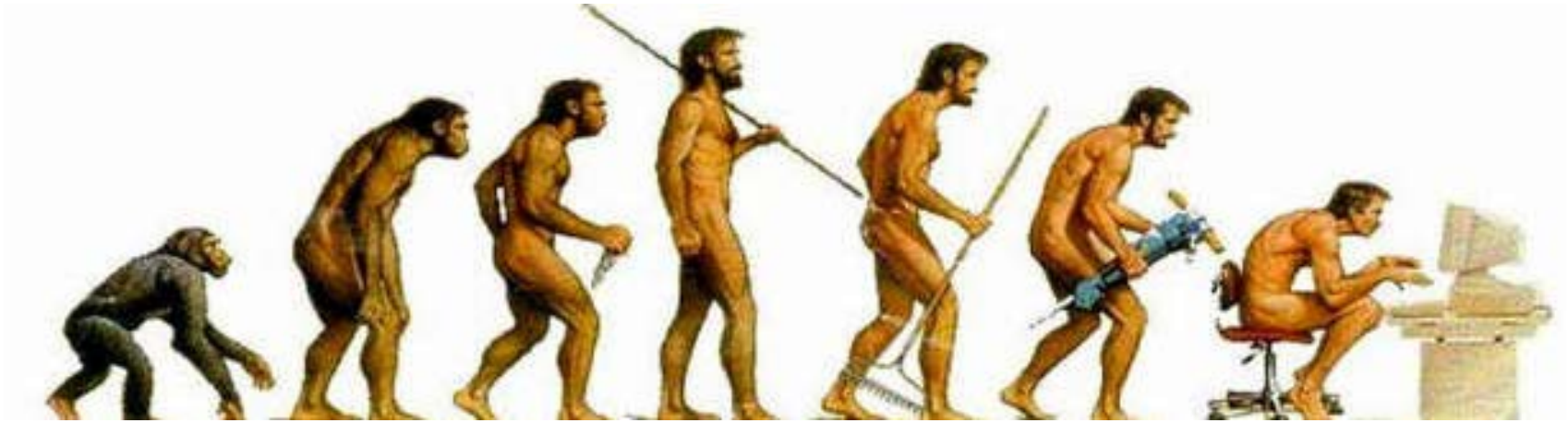
If these are standardized Core services, they do NOT rise to the “substantial” level needed. If the service is customized, it could rise to the “substantial” level, but remember, this scientist must also fulfill the other 3 criteria needed.

It is tempting to scientists who run cores to generate hundreds of papers this way... Fight it! Remember that their staff position also gets them a certain amount of security from the publish or perish world...

Cores are institutionally sanctioned: ask “who in the MGH ECORE committee is the right person to help me understand when authorship is required as part of the Core usage?”

* I run a large Core facility and would have 10,000 papers if I did this!

Author order



Grad. student

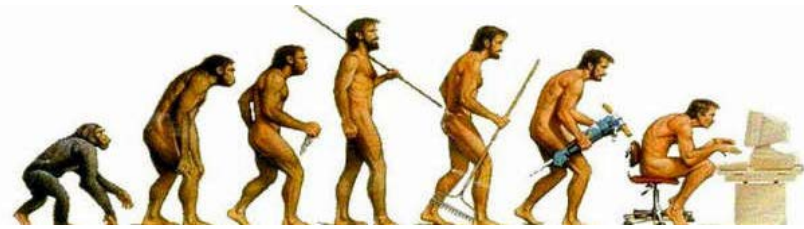
Postdoc

Assist. Prof.

Assoc. Prof.

Full Prof.

Author order

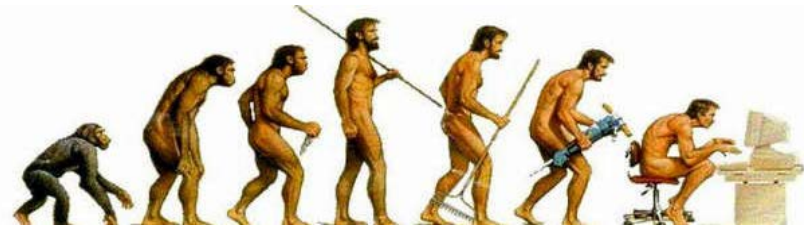


All must fulfill ICMJE requirements...

- First author ← Most credit...
- Co-first authors ← Little understood, but could be useful
- Last or “senior” author ← gets a lot of credit..., important for promotions at the more senior level...
- Second author ← Next best... counted higher in some processes than middle...
- Middle author ← All ~ the same, but not as bad as you think... contributes to your h-factor to the same degree a 1st author paper does...
- Corresponding author ← Handles some paperwork...

You want to make sure you are in the right spot...

Author order



All must fulfill ICMJE requirements...

First author



“bulk” of the work... likely does the first draft, handles edits, handles journal submission, responses to referees...

Co-first authors

Last or “senior” author



“bulk” of the responsibility of the whole process... likely supervises the writing/revisions/response to referees

Second author

Middle author

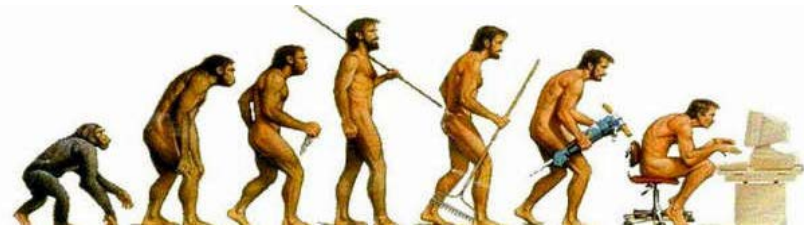
Corresponding author



Will handle future correspondence; not that important, should not be a temporary post (so will be there in 10 years...)

Others; some where in between.

Author order



Notes on Co-first authors

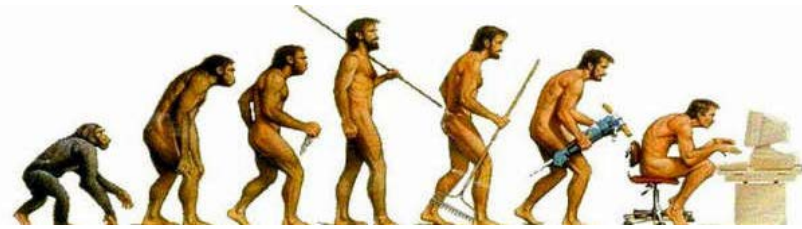
- compromise
- good for grants/promotions/ jobs...
- still cited as “Brown et al.”
- can’t list it both ways... the one listed second is always listed second... Can explain in CV.

Common situations

Postdoc 1 does bulk, is 1st author. Submits manuscript and leaves. But a month later idiot reviewers require a ton of new work -done by postdoc 2 who substantially revises manuscript... Should Postdoc 2 become first author?

Really hard to make a general rule... But should be discussed early. Co-first authors?

Senior Author



Overall supervision of project.

Often supervises/mentors 1st author (not always).

Often the originator of the idea for the study.

Oversees manuscript prep. (second only to 1st author in manuscript contribution).

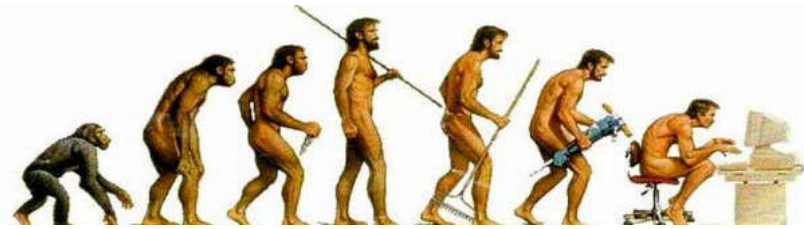
Often leader of the study team.

Often takes responsibility for IRB, IACUC, IDE, IND, clinical trial registration.

Will be held accountable for plagiarism, financial disclosures and other COIs.

Often makes decision of when/what to publish. Gets the power because they have the most on the line...

Senior Author



Q: When do I move to senior author?

A: When you do the bulk of the items below.

Overall supervision of project.

Often supervises/mentors 1st author (not always).

Often the originator of the idea for the study.

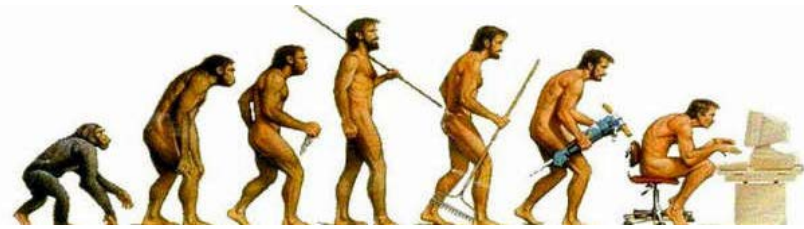
Oversees manuscript prep. (second only to 1st author in manuscript contribution).

Often leader of the study team.

Often takes responsibility for IRB, IACUC, IDE, IND, clinical trial registration.

Will be held accountable for plagiarism, financial disclosures and other COIs.

Senior Author



Q: When do I drop my usual senior author and publish alone?

A: When you meet the criteria of both first and last authors.

...and no one else meets the author threshold...

Q: What if I should be first and senior, but there is also another author?

A: No, you can't list yourself twice.

Typically just list authors in order of contributions. No real "senior author."

Q: What if I have 2 mentors that should be senior authors?

A: Let them duke-it out.

Seriously: discuss early, often the last two authors are recognized as "senior".

Mediating disputes

- Authors should really, really try, very early in process...
- Bring in a senior, trusted, uninvolved dept. figure,.
- Bring in an institutional ombudsman
- Don't bother the journal editor; this is intramural

Hot topics not discussed

Plagiarism and self-plagiarism:

assume a computer program is going to check...

Duplicate publication:

assume a computer program is going to check...

Take home messages

There is no formula.

Layout author list early, discuss openly

Know the guidelines. Use them to resolve disputes.

Take home messages

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n.woh

*“More important, however is what
I learned about myself.”*

Take home messages



“Genetic engineering got us into this mess, and genetic engineering will get us out of it.”