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Guidelines for Citing Multiple Authors

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The frequent discussions in nursing literature about citations for multiple authors suggest that correct assignment of credit does not always occur. In this article, I give advice about how to deal with some of the issues, such as:

- Who should be and who should not be listed as an author?
- When is acknowledgement rather than authorship appropriate?
- Should the most well-known person always be listed first?
- How should educators or supervisors who help students publish be listed?

The publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001, p.350) includes a section on "Publication Credit" that denotes the importance of ethics for professional writers. The international Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2001) also provides guidelines for team research and authorship.

While specific style guidelines may vary among journals, the ethical principles of honesty about authorship remain constant. Co-authors, reviewers, and editors need to be aware of issues that must be raised for correct citation when two or more authors are involved.

Provide credit in collaborative projects

In a collaborative project, citation of authors may become a formidable issue. It is rare for a professional not to wish for the recognition of being listed as an author. However, only those who make a substantial intellectual contribution merit listing.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2001) publishes a standard for attributing appropriate authorship credit. Authors who are cited need to provide a substantial contribution in three areas of the publication:

- Providing a concept or design for the study, or an analysis and interpretation of data.
- Writing or revising the manuscript for important intellectual content.
- Giving final approval of the version to be published.

When an author does not meet these criteria, recognition should be provided in an acknowledgement giving the nature of the contribution (Ohler, 2003). Negative feelings related to the omission of someone who feels they should be listed can be avoided if authorship is clearly agreed at the onset of the project.

List authors by their contributions

List authors in order by the amount of time and work they put into the manuscript. The person who does the most work should be the first author. Subsequently, authors should be listed by the amount of time and effort expended on the project. For example, the first author of a research article is often the principal investigator.

A question may arise when a well-known expert in the field is part of the project. Authors may feel that the expert should be listed first because of their stature, but this is not the case. Authors who

think that they are in a more prestigious profession or have more credentials may also feel that they deserve first authorship. Nevertheless, a physician or other professional should not be listed before a nurse who did the major work on the project and publication.

Authors are entrusted with giving valid and reliable information on authorship, just as they are for the accuracy of content. While editors have responsibility for many other factors related to scholarly writing, accuracy of authorship is entrusted to authors. In one instance, two authors - who each thought they should be first author - submitted a manuscript without authors' names on the cover page. They told the editor to decide on the author listing. She declined. The authors never did agree, and the manuscript was never published.

Agree before writing

When working on a joint project, agree in advance on the listing of authors. Authorship order should not be assumed, but sometimes it may be negotiated. For example, for partners who frequently work together the first author position may be rotated on subsequent manuscripts.

In other instance, a person who needs first authorship in order to gain more points in a tenure review may agree to do the work needed to be listed first. However, author listing is not the only criteria considered by tenure committees. The variety of co-authors and volume of productivity are additional factors the committee considers.

Unfortunately, I did not know this when I first started writing. On some of the first papers I published, I gave the first author position to my professors instead of more experienced academics who helped or guided me. I learned quickly the importance of first authorship when a graduate school admission committee did not give me full credit for the publications. Fortunately, I was still accepted. Now, as the dean of a nursing programme, I encourage educators or supervisors to be principal investigators and take the lead role in writing articles so that their work will be recognized by tenure committees.

Rearrange author order, if indicated

Even when the order of authors' names is determined in advance of a project, it may be necessary to adjust the listing based on who actually puts in the most work as the project unfolds. In some cases, the person identified as the first author may need to divert efforts in another direction, and another person may take on more work. When this occurs, the person who takes over the work should bring this to the attention of the first and all authors. A statement such as 'You seem very busy and I wouldn't mind doing this task that you agreed to do, if you will trade authorship listing with me...' can allow for a mutually agreed reassignment of the work.

On the other hand, do not rearrange the order of the authors' names without discussion. In one example of this problem, an author moved a co-author forward in the order of names, assuming this person would be pleased. She was not. Fortunately, the manuscript was able to be revised at the page-proof stage.

Require all authors to sign forms

When multiple authors are involved, all authors should sign the copyright transfer, certification of authorship, disclosure of interests, and permissions (APA, 2001). Signing these forms indicates assumption of responsibility for the accuracy of the content and authorship credit.

Early in my publishing career, when I was first author and other authors were out of town, I often signed off on page proofs. However, after one negative experience when a co-author was upset at not being involved in reading the proofs and signing off on the copyright, I now ensure that all co-

authors read manuscripts and sign off on them. With facsimile machines and email this can be accomplished easily.

Avoid assigning authorship as a courtesy

Inaccurate attribution of authorship has been noted in the scientific literature in medicine and nursing. In a classic work on scientific fraud, Chop and a Silvia (1991) include irresponsible authorship along with plagiarism, falsification of data, and fabrication of data.

Authorship should not be assigned as a courtesy. When working as a team, there are occasions when a member becomes sick, is too busy, or for a variety of reasons does not contribute to the project. If this person did contribute sufficiently to the article, this recognition can be made in an acknowledgement.

Students should not feel obligated to give a staff member acknowledgement of authorship for assistance intrinsic to their role of educator or supervisor member. For example, if the student was assisted in the development of the paper as a class project and the final paper is submitted for publication, the educator's name does not need to be added.

One day, I received a telephone call about a published article that listed me as an author. The caller asked for more information. I was surprised, because I did not recognize the title of the article. On calling the editor, I was told that the article had been written by a student intern and somehow my name had been included. Never list a person as an author without their permission. Even ask people who are acknowledged to give permission to include their names in the manuscript.

Clarify student-educator relationships

Educators can promote scholarship of students by assisting them to publish. However, it is critical that when students are assisted by professors to publish their projects, papers, or dissertations that emotional blackmail is not applied. Educators are paid to supervise dissertations and thus, similar to paid editors, should not be included as authors on publications stemming from a dissertation or student's work.

However, sometimes educators work with students after a dissertation or project is finished, and mentor the student or new graduate in the publication process. When substantial "unpaid" time is spent working with a student or new graduate and a grade is no longer dependent on the relationship, joint authorship is appropriate.

A dissertation chairperson or supervisor may become intensely involved in a student's work and provide leadership that merits inclusion. A student may feel honoured to add the recognized name of such a person as a co-author. However, this is only appropriate when help beyond the normal role has been given. In some cases the contribution of the expert is apparent and recognizable in the finished project, and so joint authorship is justified by the product. Nevertheless, listing the student as first author is usually appropriate regardless of the student's gratitude for the staff member's assistance.

Students sometimes ask staff members to read papers that they feel may be publishable and ask for advice on the publishing process. After an assessment of the amount of time it will take, I either advise the student on the minor adjustments needed and how to proceed, or suggest that major work is needed. I explain that when a significant amount of help is needed, the mentor is usually listed as the second author. I also explain that the rewriting process is external to the standing the paper has in the educational programme, unless the student wants to do an "independent study" for credit to prepare the paper for publication.

Mentoring new authors

Many experienced nursing authors provide mentorship to less published authors through collaborative projects. Experienced authors can help novices learn the art of skill of writing by working in a collaborative, team relationship (Davidhizar & Dowd, 1998). As a dean and experienced writer, I have advanced the scholarship of educators or researchers by assisting them with publication projects in a team arrangement. Whereas initially I do a majority of the work and serve as first author, as the contribution of new authors increases they become first authors.

Recognize standards in other disciplines

If you write with a person in another profession, identify the co-authorship system used in journals for that profession. Nursing authors, reviewers, and editors should appreciate that in some scientific circles other practices for ordering authors' names may be used (Werley et al, 1981; Zucherman, 1968). These include listing by:

- Alphabetical order
- Extent of scientific contribution
- Major contributors in alphabetical order

When publishing in another field and the system is different from that in nursing, clarify the differences. For example, a nurse who has co-authored with a person in another discipline can accept being listed in alphabetical order when this is the accepted practice in that journal.

For research manuscripts in many disciplines, citation is based on the specific role and contribution of each investigator, such as project co-ordinator, project director and planner, data collector, data analyzer, manuscript writer, or critical reviewer. In some research journals, the editor may request written documentation of each author's contribution.

Remove the author who does no work

Finally, the last strategy for successful co-authorship is negotiating your way out when a co-author does not complete an assignment. This may be done by giving a deadline and when it is not met, stating that the project will need to proceed without that person's involvement. Clearly communicate in writing as well as orally that authorship credit will not be given because the commitment agreed on was not kept.

Summary

Whatever the decision about authorship, making it in advance and putting it in writing can save hard feelings later. The order of authors' names should indicate the relative contribution of each person. Authorship provides professional recognition, and so its accuracy is important to the integrity of the written work.

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Author Background

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