

Authorship: Who truly deserves the credit?

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EDITORIAL

Publishing research is the highest form of disseminating research results, and places important social and ethical obligations on the author(s). For authors engaged in scholarly work, successful publication significantly enhances opportunities for academic funding and professional advancement, while simultaneously elevating scientific and scholarly recognition. Nevertheless, the privileges associated with authorship demand a comprehensive responsibility, including the thorough planning, implementation, analysis, and reporting of research, as well as the ethical considerations, the integrity of the content, and implications related to scholarly works being published.

Research misconduct encompasses unethical practices in research and publication, primarily urging the retraction of academic articles and promoting public skepticism and distrust in science (Candal-Pedreira et al., 2023). The criteria for legitimate co-authorship are extensively debated, with questionable authorship practices frequently identified as a significant challenge to research integrity (Godecharle et al., 2018). Many questionable authorship practices do not meet the legal definitions of research misconduct, which generally encompass only falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism (Goddiksen et al., 2023). Being an author is not just a recognition, but it holds great responsibility and accountability. So, who deserves to be credited as an author?

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME, 2015), 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 (scholarship); AND
- Drafting the work or reviewing it critically for important intellectual content (authorship); AND
- Final approval of the version to be published (approval); 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 (agreement).

A person should meet all these criteria to be considered as an author. All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an acknowledgment section. However, these criteria continue and are rampantly violated by many authors who prowl with the publication of scientific works and articles. One of the concerns of the academic community in regards to authorship and considered to be morally and ethically unacceptable – the gift authorship or honorary author. I shared this thought in my public social media post and repeatedly shared but seems to be ignored. Still, I would like to share this again anyway.

Gift authorship is defined as “co-authorship awarded to a person who has not contributed significantly to the study. Most of the senior researcher pressured their junior researchers to award the authorship There are several possible reasons for gift authorship. Junior researchers often feel pressured to accept or assign authorship to their senior co-workers who have substantial powers over their future careers. In addition, junior researchers may believe that including more experienced colleagues as authors will increase their chances of publication. Senior investigators may give gift authorship for encouraging collaboration and maintaining good working relations or as repayment for favors. Regardless of the cause, gift authorship is an unacceptable practice for academic publications” (Zaki, 2011).

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Authorship should ideally be limited to colleagues who make a genuine academic contribution to an article. Issues between undergraduate students and their thesis advisers have been circulating on social media. Some have questioned whether the thesis adviser should be considered an author. If they are included as an author, where should their name be placed?

Considering the ICMJE authorship criteria, a thesis or dissertation adviser should only be listed as an author if they have contributed to the research described in the paper, regardless of whether it is an undergraduate or graduate thesis. When a significant portion of the thesis or dissertation is included in the paper, the student who made the most substantial contribution is recognized as the principal author. Senior authorship, on the other hand, is typically reserved for the thesis adviser or, in some cases, the principal investigator overseeing the project in which the student conducted a study component. These titles carry both distinction and responsibility, emphasizing the importance of properly crediting each contributor's role. Moreover, the student should approve on the final version of the article to be published and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

In the question, whose name should come first? In determining the sequence of authorship, Riesenbergs and Lundberg (1990) have a simple but concise suggestion:

- The practice of awarding honorary authorship is unacceptable. Individuals who provide support and advice that does not meet the criteria for authorship may be acknowledged with their consent.
- The first author is the individual who has made the greatest contribution, including writing the manuscript.
- The sequence of author listing is determined by the relative contributions to the work.
- It is customary for the senior author to be listed last, sometimes regardless of their contribution. The senior author, like all other authors, must meet all authorship criteria.
- Decisions regarding authors and the order of their names should be made as early as possible, even at the beginning, although relative contributions may need to be reviewed later by group consensus.

There are various concerns regarding authorship, including ghost authorship and issues related to the authorship or contributorship of published data. We welcome the submission of editorials and perspectives to share in the Mindoro Journal of Social Sciences and Development Studies (MJSSDS). We also encourage comments responding to the ideas shared in this journal.

Keywords: *authorship criteria; gift authorship; research misconduct; academic integrity; publication ethics*

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