



Best Practices for Authorship

Those collaborating on a project with the intent to publish findings from their work should have conversations regarding authorship at the beginning of the project to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what constitutes authorship. This document provides some definitions and a list of responsibilities for various roles to help guide these decisions. This is meant as a starting point for discussions. Your team may adapt these guidelines to best suit your particular project.

Equity and Ethics of Authorship in Global Health Research

When beginning the conversations with research colleagues and teams about the dissemination of findings through publications, conferences, presentations, or posters, **it is important to address the difficult topic of equity and ethics.**

Many researchers and professionals report that **there can be an imbalance at the onset** when the field team (which may include co-investigators) has the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to implement the research activities, but may be inexperienced in writing or communicating research findings^{1,2}.

Without the field team the research cannot be done, **yet too often these critical members of the research team are excluded from the writing and authorship of findings.** These imbalances need to be addressed early on to ensure your research team is not contributing to these imbalances.

Here are some strategies to support equity in global health research teams:

- 1) When determining roles of authorship, **recognize team members who will require mentorship** and skill development and prepare for it. Assign someone with the right skill set to the leader who can support the development of necessary skill sets. This may be a co-author or a supervisor.
- 2) Invest in **training and capacity building for your international team** that will target skills they need to be able to more independently author research (e.g. courses on manuscript writing, statistics, presenting data). This will take time and should be part of a longer-term strategy for your research partnership.

Key Definitions:

Leader: Person who is leading the manuscript writing, moving the project forward, sending it out for review. This person would typically be the first author on paper.

Leader responsibilities:

- Develop research idea/question that will be the focus of the manuscript
- Present work to colleagues
- Write initial outline/ draft of manuscript, identify co-authors who contributed to the work
- Seek input from senior supervisor as the writing process moves forward
- Submit manuscript to chosen journal in consultation with the senior advisor
- Act as corresponding author on the manuscript
- Respond to reviewer comments from the journal

Supervisor: Person who is primary supervisor and mentor for subproject. This person would typically be the last author on paper (this is often the principal investigator, but does not have to be the PI).

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4061921/>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6993386/>



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Supervisor responsibilities

- Help refine research question and how it is presented in the manuscript
- Advise on appropriate journal for submission of manuscript
- Provide significant editing of manuscript and advise on the content and layout of the written work (i.e. what's the best/clearest way to tell the "story")
- Provide opportunities for mentees to improve their writing skills (e.g. providing resources, workshops). One such resource can be found here: [Welcome to the PLOS Writing Center](#)

Statistician: Leads the statistical analysis of a dataset pertaining to the research question. This person is typically the **second** or **third** author on the paper.

Statistician responsibilities

- Provide input on feasibility of research question from a statistical perspective
- Work with project leader to provide appropriate datasets
- Lead the analysis of data
- Provide data tables and figures for the manuscript, ensure that the data are sound
- Review manuscript and provide input on statistical methods

Coauthors: Play a significant role in project development and/or project implementation and/or writing of manuscript, per the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines, section 2.

Review the ICMJE [Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals](#) for in depth information about who is an author and what constitutes authorship.

Co-authors responsibilities (in summary):

- Review and help edit manuscript in a timely manner
- Should provide substantial contribution to conception and design of the study OR the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data

Authorship order

The suggested authorship order is: project leader, statistician, coauthors (in order of seniority), supervisor/mentor of project.

Please note that there are times when two people equally contribute as leaders. In these cases, the option of co-first author can be used to denote this shared attribution. This should be discussed at the start of the writing process.

Authorship role: In a multi-authored paper, it is important to delineate the role each author has. This is mainly to ensure that specific parts of the paper are written adequately. [Contributor Roles Taxonomy \(CRediT\)](#) describes the contribution each author can make, and provides information on the 14 roles that can be attributed to authors. This site can be a useful tool to ensure that all authors understand the roles they play in a manuscript.

Acknowledgements

At times, there are team members who do not meet the standard of authorship, but contributed in important ways to the development of the project or manuscript (e.g., funding, proofreading/editing, etc). These individuals (or institutions) can be acknowledged by the author in the relevant section of the paper.