



BROWN

## Guidelines on Authorship in Scholarly or Scientific Publications

### I. Introduction

Determining authorship is an important component of upholding the integrity of the research and scholarly enterprise, and serves as an explicit way of assigning responsibility and giving credit for intellectual work. Authorship credit should be given to those who contribute and participate in substantive ways to scholarly and scientific work, and should honestly and accurately reflect actual contributions. Fair and equitable determination of authorship is important to the reputation, academic promotion, and funding support of the individuals involved, and to the strength and reputation of the authors' respective institutions.

Many institutions and peer-review journals have established standards for authorship that have consistent key principles. Experience with best practices demonstrates that being transparent and communicating these key principles at the beginning of projects helps to promote constructive, conflict-free collaborations. In practice, various inducements have fostered authorship practices that fall short of these standards. Whereas ghost writing and gift authorship reflect one extreme, more commonly substandard practices are employed to improve the credibility of intellectual work, increase competitiveness for publication or funding, or to avoid interpersonal conflict.

As early as possible in the research or scholarly process, collaborators should discuss the general requirements for authorship of any manuscript that will report results of joint work. This does not mean deciding who will – or will not – be an author. Rather, the principles guiding authorship decisions should be discussed, potentially with reference to this or similar guidance documents. To prevent misunderstandings, it is recommended that discussions of authorship standards be held openly and frequently within collaborative projects. Agreements should be established between coauthors early in the writing process for each manuscript, and these agreements should be reviewed and revised as needed to reflect changes in the actual contributions of each individual.

Disagreements sometimes arise regarding who should be named as an author of or contributor to intellectual work and the order in which individuals should be listed. Some of these disputes are a result of failed communication and expectation setting. These Guidelines are meant to serve as a set of standards that are shared by the academic community as a whole, to help facilitate open communication through adherence to common principles. These principles apply to all intellectual products, whether published or prepared for internal use or for broad dissemination.

## II. Applicability

These Guidelines apply to all faculty, students, postdoctoral researchers, and staff.

Legal ownership of research data and materials produced in the course of Brown University research activities resides with the University and not with the individual investigator.

Designing an ethical and transparent approach to authorship and publication of research is the responsibility of the principal investigator(s). This Guidance document outlines the ethical responsibilities of the investigator(s) and the University resources available to support implementation of the principles outlined herein.

Brown University acknowledges and appreciates that there are many different standards across fields regarding authorship (e.g., the order in which authors are listed). As a result, each laboratory, department, and/or school should have conversations and clear guidelines around discipline-specific standards of authorship and, if needed, should supplement these Guidelines with a description of their own customary ways of deciding who should be an author and the order in which authors will be listed. If such standards are documented in writing, they should be made available to all collaborators and discussed at the beginning of the collaboration.

## III. Criteria for Authorship

Brown University recommends that authorship be based on the following four criteria, defined by the International Committee for Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)<sup>1</sup>:

- 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.

Some diversity exists across academic disciplines regarding acceptable standards for substantive contributions that would lead to attribution of authorship. This guidance is intended to allow for such variation in disciplinary best practices while ensuring authorship is not inappropriately assigned.

### Acknowledgements, Gift and Ghost Authorship

Individuals who do not meet the requirements for authorship, but who have provided a valuable contribution to the work, should be acknowledged for their contributing role as appropriate to the

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<sup>1</sup> The ICMJE provides comprehensive instruction on authorship that is not detailed in this Guidance document, but can be accessed on its [website](#).

publication. Gift authorship should not be conferred on those who have not made intellectual contributions to the work, or whose intellectual contributions are limited. For example, provision of routine technical services or a valuable reagent, referral of patients or participants for a study, assistance with data collection and management, or review of a completed manuscript for suggestions, are activities unlikely to meet criteria for authorship. Although not qualifying as co-authors, individuals who assist with the research effort in these ways may warrant appropriate acknowledgement in the completed paper or presentation.

Ghost authorship is intentionally not identifying as an author someone who made substantial contributions to the research or writing of a manuscript that merited authorship. It includes employing authors for hire with the understanding that they will not be credited. Ghost authorship is not a practice that meets the principles outlined in this guidance.

## IV. Implementation

Successful implementation of these Guidelines relies on a commitment to collegiality and open, frank, consistent communication and expectation-setting throughout the research and scholarly process. Integral to implementation of these Guidelines is the following:

- Research groups should discuss authorship credit/criteria, presentation of joint work, and future directions of the research as early as practical, and frequently, during the course of their work. This should involve explicit discussion of expectations of continued collaboration if a contributor who would normally be considered an author leaves the project or institution during the conduct of the work. The lead investigator should initiate these discussions; however, any collaborator may raise questions or seek clarity throughout the course of the collaboration. Each lab or group may consider having a written guiding document in place.
- Collaborators are expected to adhere to good laboratory practices, including maintaining a complete laboratory notebook and annotating electronic files, as these practices will aide in identifying and clarifying individuals' contributions to a project.
- Disposition of collaborative data and research materials should be mutually agreed upon among collaborators as early as practical and in accordance with any data-sharing and retention requirements;
- Laboratories, departments, and educational programs supporting scholarly work at Brown should include in any procedure manuals these Guidelines and a description of their own customary ways of deciding who should be an author and the order in which authors are listed. These Guidelines and customary practices should be included in orientation of new members.
- Discussion of the principles of authorship outlined in this guidance should be integrated into any responsible conduct of research course that is taught at Brown.

## V. Authorship Disputes and Resolution

Conflicts related to authorship may arise at any time during the research or scholarly process, resulting from differing perceptions of one's contributions and resulting attribution of credit. Brown University recommends adherence to the following procedures when a dispute arises, unless disagreements are a result of alleged fabrication or falsification of data or plagiarism and, therefore, instead subject to the institution's [\*Policy on Handling Allegations of Research Misconduct\*](#):

- 1) Resolution of disputes among collaborators through open and collegial discourse and mutual agreement is strongly encouraged. To facilitate this process, any prior decisions or discussions among authors, including verbal or written agreements between coauthors, should be reviewed and considered. These Guidelines and any documented customary practices in the relevant discipline should be applied, as appropriate. Extending an invitation to a mutually agreed upon party outside the group who is familiar with publication norms in the field to informally serve as a neutral facilitator may ensure that all viewpoints are weighed and considered and objectively applied. It is expected that most disputes will be resolved collegially among collaborators.
- 2) If the disagreement cannot be resolved among collaborators, input should be sought from a neutral third party, such as the University Ombudsperson or other trusted parties.
  - a) Department-level resolution. The collaborators should engage the Department Chair or his/her designee to facilitate a resolution of the dispute acceptable to all parties. This assumes that the Department Chair is not a direct party to the dispute and does not otherwise have a conflict of interest. If multiple departments are involved in the dispute or the Department Chair has a conflict, the parties may opt to engage the University Ombudsperson.
  - b) Engagement of the University Ombudsperson. Brown's ombudsperson is a resource available to all members of Brown University and can act as a neutral party to mediate disputes at any point in the process. The ombudsperson is skilled at facilitating conflict resolution and while he/she cannot adjudicate an authorship dispute by taking formal action, he/she may bring together the parties involved to assist them in reaching their own settlement.
  - c) If the dispute involves doctoral research by a student, the student should refer the matter to the chair of his/her dissertation committee. If the chair of the dissertation committee has a conflict (i.e., is a coauthor of the work), then a referral should be made to the Director of Graduate Studies of the student's program to facilitate resolution.
3. Resolution at the Dean level. If the steps outlined above are not able to yield timely resolution, the Dean of the Graduate School or the Dean of Faculty, whichever is more appropriate given the circumstances of the dispute, may work to negotiate a resolution of the dispute acceptable to the parties.

**Guidelines Owner:** The Office of the Vice-President for Research

**Contact Person for Guidelines:** Keri Godin, Director, Office of Research Integrity

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