

Authorship of the Research Report: Perils and Responsibilities

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Several critical questions relating to authorship of a research report should be answered by study participants early in the process of preparing a manuscript. Depending on the type of study, some of these questions may present ethical, social, and even locally political issues. All of these issues should be resolved before the manuscript is submitted to a journal for publication. Here are a few of the more important and a brief discussion of each.

- (1) Who will be the first author? What are the responsibilities of the first author?
- (2) Who will be the *corresponding* author and what are that individual's responsibilities?
- (3) Who approves the manuscript before it is submitted and after any necessary revisions before resubmission?
- (4) What types of participation merit inclusion as an author?
- (5) How should authors be ordered?
- (6) Why does author order matter?

Determining who will be first author

Generally speaking, the first author will be the individual who had *primary responsibility* for the design, implementation, and analysis of the study as well as for preparation of the manuscript reporting the study. Sometimes, with a larger project involving several individuals and several manuscripts, a set of authors may agree to rotate the first authorship position among the several manuscripts. In any case, this issue must be resolved by the authors themselves before a particular manuscript is submitted to a journal. The editorial staff of the *Journal of Prosthodontics* will not participate in this decision.

Responsibilities of the first author

The first author has primary responsibility for the content of the manuscript. In addition, the first author must ensure that all authors have the opportunity to read the manuscript and propose revisions before it is submitted. This process, obviously important to the original preparation of the manuscript, is equally important when a manuscript is returned by the journal editor with a request for specific revisions. The first author has

the responsibility to implement and monitor the revision process, ensuring that the process does not get bogged down as the requested revisions are being made and that the final version of the manuscript is reapproved by all authors and resubmitted as expeditiously as possible. The *Journal of Prosthodontics* requires that the first author sign all copyright legal forms.

Responsibilities of the corresponding author

This individual is the “point person” for the manuscript, the person with whom the *Journal of Prosthodontics* will have direct contact and after publication, the individual whom readers may contact concerning the report. As stated above, this person may or may not be the manuscript's first author. During the submission and revision process, responsibilities for overseeing the efficient implementation of revisions may be delegated by the first author to the corresponding author. The structure of this division of labor is the responsibility of the authors themselves, primarily the first author.

What types of participation merit inclusion as an author?

Resolving this ethical and political issue is also the responsibility of first author. Generally speaking, most authorities hold that only those individuals who have participated directly in the design, data collection, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript merit inclusion as authors. According to this view, participation in data collection without any responsibility for interpretation or provision of technical revision of the manuscript without original contribution to it, do not merit listing as an author. Conventions differ among laboratories and institutions, however, and journal editorial staff members, including those of the *Journal of Prosthodontics*, do not participate in this decision.

How should authors be ordered?

After the first author, the remaining authors should be listed in order of their contribution to the manuscript, as determined by

the lead author. In some institutions and research groups, convention holds that the final author listed be the senior researcher, perhaps the mentor who guided and suggested the work. There may be times when the contributions of the remaining authors are so equal it is impossible to determine an appropriate order for listing them. In such instances, the lead author may choose to list them alphabetically or simply list them at random. Regardless of how the matter is handled, all authors should be informed as to the order in which they are listed and be given the opportunity to lobby the lead author for higher placement if they feel it is deserved.

Why does author order matter?

Author order, particularly designation of the lead author, is most important for delineating the multiple responsibilities listed above. It also becomes important when the work is cited by later researchers. Typically, only the first author will be cited

in the text of a subsequent report (i.e., Smith et al), and many journals, including the *Journal of Prosthodontics*, include only the first three authors followed by et al (i.e., Smith, Jones, Felton, et al) in the references list. Authors who are particularly interested in seeing their names in print will want to appear among the first three authors of any report.

If, at any time in the review process, one of the co-authors disputes the order of authors listed, the *Journal of Prosthodontics* will cease review of the manuscript and return it to the authors. The lead author will be responsible for settling the order of authorship dispute. Once settled, the *Journal of Prosthodontics* will return the manuscript to its original order in the review queue.

In general, developing an efficient and well-defined strategy for managing manuscript preparation, submission, and revision will help move the process along as rapidly and efficiently as possible and bring the authors closer to that moment when they see their names listed in the pages of a journal.

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