

AUTHORSHIP VS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IN ARTICLE WRITING: DECIDING WHO, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY

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Publishing is an essential part of distributing new knowledge, and manuscript authorship is expected of academic family medicine faculty. Deciding whether a fellow scholar's contribution qualifies for authorship or acknowledgement can be challenging. We offer practical guidance on the who, when, where, and why of determining authorship versus acknowledgement.

Authors make substantial intellectual contributions and participate in writing and revising the manuscript.¹ Authors are accountable for content and must meet criteria outlined in the journal to which they are submitting. Published guidelines on authorship can be useful for new faculty.² A statistician is included as an author only when they conducted data analysis and interpretation, otherwise, they should be acknowledged. Individuals who offer limited input, such as coaching or mentorship, should be acknowledged.^{1,2}

Who Is an Author?

Make decisions before writing begins. Decisions include identifying coauthors, defining roles (first, senior, corresponding author), and mutually agreeing on author order based on contribution.³ Authorship order may change if individual contribution to the project changes.

Acknowledgements can be determined later in the writing process, eg, when someone declines authorship or makes limited contributions, such as offering feedback, technical assistance, or funders/sponsors.^{1,4} Clearly describe the acknowledged individuals' contributions.

When to Decide?

The first author makes the greatest contribution to the manuscript, while the senior author—often listed last—provides oversight and assistance with concept development.^{1,3} The corresponding author handles communication with the journal.² Acknowledgments are placed at the end of the manuscript and may include individuals and organizations that supported the work in nonauthorial ways such as supplying a data set, formatting, editing, or technical help.⁴ Research participants and research coordinators should be thanked in the acknowledgements. Intentional and substantial use of artificial intelligence must be acknowledged.⁵

Where to List Contributions?

Why Does the Distinction Matter?

This distinction is crucial for academic integrity and career progression. Authors receive formal credit, are indexed in databases, and are responsible for article content.^{2,3}

Their work contributes to their CV, promotion, and professional recognition.^{1,3} Acknowledged individuals, while appreciated, are not accountable for article content and are not searchable in academic databases.

Clear understanding and early communication about authorship and acknowledgement helps avoids conflicts, establishes responsibilities, and ensures fair recognition. For early-career academic faculty, strategically accepting first authorship opportunities can impact career advancement. Following established guidelines and maintaining transparency, fosters ethical and productive dissemination of new knowledge.

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