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# Co-authoring

## Getting started

## Who is a co-author?

Defining who is a co-author largely depends on the discipline:

**Medicine** - in 1985 the **International Committee of Medical Journal Editors** devised the **Vancouver Protocol** to solve problems of misuse of authorship.

**Humanities** - authors must have contributed to writing the paper, other contributors are typically credited in the acknowledgements.

**Social sciences** - authorship based on substantive contributions, not just contributions to writing the paper.

**Science, maths and technology** - definitions of co-authors are largely defined by journal or publisher guidelines, or refer to the Vancouver Protocol.

## Vancouver Protocol

Authorship credit should *ideally* be based on all of the following criteria:

- Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis of and interpretation of data.
- Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content.
- Final approval of the version to be published.

## Other types of authorship

**Gift** – credit is given as a tribute, or a ‘ploy for recognition’, often because it is expected, eg by the head of the lab or group.

**Guest** – inclusion of a name increases the likelihood of publication and/or citation.

**Mutual support** – sharing authorship to increase each others’ apparent productivity

All of these could be seen as unjustified authorship and could lead to accusations of ethical misconduct.



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# **Practicalities of co-authoring**

## Finding a co-author

You might begin with finding a collaborator for your research, or consider whether:

- your findings are significant enough for a whole paper.
- there is someone whose work relates to yours, where you have conducted research separately but could write up your findings together.

## Where to find a co-author:

- institutional repositories.
- profile pages on department and institute websites.
- attend events and talk to people.

Also consider how you are going to respond to invitations from others.

## Working together

- Be clear about everyone's roles and the expected input at the outset.
- Set deadlines and workflows.
- Agree actions; if you're unsure what you should be doing check.
- Use tools to help plan workload.
- Regular meetings and check-ins (online or in person).

## Collaboration tools

- **Meeting** - Google Hangouts, Skype.
- **Planning** - Asana, Google Drive, Trello, Wunderlist.
- **Writing** - Etherpad, FidusWriter, Google Drive

## Writing together

### Key questions:

- Who is contributing what?
- Who will edit, review and approve?
- Who is the lead and ultimately responsible for getting the final output published?

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# Publishing

## Author attribution

Key questions:

- **Who** to attribute?
- **How** to attribute?
- Agree before writing begins.
- Check if your institution has any policies or guidelines, eg [Michigan State University Guidelines on Authorship](#).
- Follow journal or publisher guidelines.
- Use a system of weighting based on contributions.

## Preventing disputes

- Start discussions about attribution early in proceedings - be clear about criteria for what constitutes authorship.
- Know the regulations of prospective journals.
- Sign a formal agreement.

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