**AUTHORSHIP AGREEMENTS**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

Either during or after your candidature, you are likely to publish your research. One activity that is usually very straightforward, but sometimes remarkably convoluted, revolves around who should be the authors. For example, which of the following individuals should be co-authors of your papers.

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| Which of these individuals should be co-authors of your papers? |
| A person who manages the research groups in which you belong, but has not contributed to your research specifically |
| A supervisor who has not contributed to this paper |
| The lab technician who helped you collect the data |
| A statistician who helped you use the software package—but did not shape your choice on which analyses to conduct or help you interpret the output? |
| The people who sent you the data—data they had collected many years ago for another purpose |

In general, besides exceptional circumstances, none of these individuals should be co-authors. Yet, in practice, managing disputes around authorship can be challenging. This document clarifies who should be co-authors and how to prevent or manage conflicts about authorship.

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| **The Vancouver Protocol** |

Some of the accepted practices around authorship vary across disciplines. For example,

* in some disciplines, such as medical research, papers are attributed to many authors, sometimes more than 20
* in other disciplines, such as philosophy, papers are usually attributed to fewer authors, usually fewer than 4.

Yet, in most circumstances, this difference in the number of authors is indicative of diverse research practices rather than conflicting authorship practices. For example, in some disciplines, more people contribute to the analysis or interpretation and to the writing of papers. Therefore, in these disciplines, the number of authors is often elevated.

Indeed, most universities and research institutions follow specific guidelines on who should be granted authorship—guidelines called the Vancouver Protocol. According to these guidelines, only researchers who fulfil three criteria should be granted authorship, as the following table outlines

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| Criteria | Description | Caveats |
| Substantial contribution to the study | The researcher must have contributed substantially towards the conception and design, towards the analysis and interpretation, or towards both. | Roughly, according to one interpretation of this criterion, they should have contributed at least 10% to the conception and design or at least 10% to the analysis and interpretation |
| Drafting | The researcher contributed intellectually to drafting or revising the article | The contribution of this researcher should exceed editorial feedback, such as spelling, punctuation, or grammar but should affect the interpretations. |
| Approval | The researcher approved the final version of this publication | Therefore, the researcher is willing to assume responsibility for this paper. |

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| **How to apply the Vancouver Protocol sensitively** |

The Vancouver Protocol, although relatively unambiguous, can be hard to apply in practice. When research candidates inform a supervisor they have not included this person as a co-author, the relationship can sour. Most candidates, understandably, would prefer to maintain a strong relationship with their supervisor then apply the Vancouver Protocol too strictly. This section discusses how candidates can circumvent these challenges.

**Encourage contributions**

Whenever supervisors contribute significantly to the paper, they are granted authorship and these conflicts do not unfold. The question, then, is how to encourage supervisors to contribute significantly to the paper. The following table outlines some approaches that could achieve this goal.

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| Approach | Details |
| Ask specific questions about the conception, design, analysis, or interpretation | Sometimes, research candidates send long documents, such as research proposals, to their associate supervisors and then request feedback. Busy associate supervisors might approve the proposal but offer no advice. Instead, to prompt more engagement and guidance, ask specific questions like   * Do you think I should broaden the sample? * How could I recruit more participants? * The sample might be biased. How could I solve this limitation and other limitations? * Which methodologies are most suited to this theoretical perspective? * How should I proceed if these assumptions are violated   To encourage supervisors to answer these questions over email, you could write   * I am progressing on my research, but still need to resolve the following questions. I would be really interested in your insights or thoughts about these questions |
| Ask specific questions about your drafts as well | That is, you could include comments in the Word document, such as   * I feel this sentence is unclear; how do you feel I could improve this sentence * Can you think of other explanations of this finding. I feel my arguments are not strong enough * Can you let me know which of my paragraphs were confusing? * Have I overlooked any flaws in this argument? |
| Set deadlines respectfully | You could write, for example   * To achieve the plans we have set, I am hoping to submit the paper in July. Do you think this deadline is feasible. If so, are you available late June to correct my drafts? |

**Develop Authorship Agreements**

Sometimes, the conflicts that surround authorship emanate from genuine misunderstandings. Supervisors are sometimes oblivious to the principles that underpin the Vancouver Protocol and may assume that all supervisors should be granted authorship, despite attempts from the university to redress this misconception. Instead, one approach that could help candidates clarify the Vancouver Protocol to supervisors and to prevent conflict is to construct an Authorship Agreement. Specifically, as early as possible, and at least several months before you plan to publish a specific paper, you should

* Use the following template to begin an authorship agreement
* Email your supervisors and other potential co-authors this agreement. Perhaps write “The Office of Research and Innovation have indicated that, for each paper I plan to submit, I should construct an authorship agreement. If possible, could you help me complete this agreement”

Here is an example of an authorship agreement. You could include the CDU logo as well.

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| **Provisional title of the paper:** |  |
| **Summary.** In a few bullet points, summarise this paper   * … * … * … | |
| **Contributors.** List all the people who are likely to contribute to this paper—as well as to the studies reported in this paper. Include people who may not be authors as well.   * … * … * … | |
| **Roles.** Each person should specify the main roles he or she is likely to fulfil during each phase of the research   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Name | Conception  and design | Analysis and interpretation | Drafting and correcting | | Example | * Discussed which spurious variables to control * Assisted in survey construction | * Suggested which methods to apply to analyze the data * Discussed other explanations of the main finding | * Provided substantive feedback on two drafts | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | | |
| **Co-authorship.** Each person should then decide whether they should be included as a co-author. To be included as a co-author, they should fulfil the Vancouver Protocol:   * The co-author must have contributed substantially, at least 10% or so, towards the conception and design, towards the analysis and interpretation, or towards both. * The co-author must have contributed intellectually to drafting or revising the article * The co-author must approve the final version of this publication * Not all supervisors are necessarily co-authors.   To complete this table   * Each person completes the second column * The candidate and principal complete the third and fourth column * The relevant individuals should discuss each discrepancy. * The fourth column may be the likely order of authors on the paper—unless you need to follow other conventions  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Name | Tick if you fulfil this protocol | Tick if the person fulfils this protocol, according to the  candidate and principal | Rank these individuals according to the extent to which they contributed to this paper | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | | |
| **Expectations about the paper**. Specify   * the likely outlets, such as the journal or journals in which the paper may be submitted * the date the manuscript is likely to be submitted; the date might need to be deferred to fulfill contractual arrangements, such as non-disclosure agreements | |
| **Certification**. Record emails that indicate that every contributor supports this agreement. Or collect signatures. | |

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| **Redundant publications** |

Besides the decision on who should be an author, another source of contention revolves around the number of papers that should be published. The key issue is whether authors should publish two or more papers that entail overlapping content.

**Multiple papers from one dataset**

In general, if you utilize the same dataset in more than one publication, several problems unfold. In particular

* problems with the dataset could thus contaminate too many publications
* editors need to conserve space and, therefore, papers should be as distinct as possible
* in their advertisements, journals maintain they present only original material

Consequently, you should not utilize the same dataset in more than one publication unless

* most of the variables that you broach in one publication are not broached in another publication; that is, the variables or measures should hardly overlap,
* you have informed the editors of this overlap in the cover letter and attached these previous works if possible, or
* you want to publish a paper that significantly updates a preliminary report, such as a conference proceedings

**Media releases and informal outlets**

Researchers often submit media releases as well as simplified versions of papers to an informal outlet, such as a magazine. This practice is acceptable provided that

* the media release or simplified versions are disseminated after the paper has been accepted; otherwise, if you need to adjust the paper in response to feedback, you might have inadvertently presented misleading information to the media
* you have cited the paper clearly in these media releases or simplified versions.

Alternatively, you could submit a media release about a study you plan to conduct or have started to conduct. These submissions are different, because you are not implying the results are final.