

# Who signs the paper?



**Authorship on a paper gives credit where it is due, but it also comes with responsibilities. Here we discuss our policies and offer advice on best practice.**

Long gone are the days when papers were signed by a handful of trainees who conducted the work under the supervision of a principal investigator. As cancer research has become increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary, author lists have expanded. Today, lengthy author lists are the norm, with footnotes flagging equal contributions and shared corresponding author status also being very frequent. In this complex collaborative environment, what determines who should be an author on the paper, and what does authorship really mean?

The simple answer is that anyone who has contributed materially to the study should be an author. In practice, determining what constitutes a substantial contribution may require more nuanced consideration and discussion between the researchers involved. As a guide, contributions worthy of authorship would not be limited to conducting the bulk of the experiments and obtaining the relevant results. Rather, it includes conceptual efforts such as conceiving the study or designing its lines of enquiry; work to analyze and interpret the data, including through computational means (something increasingly important in the age of big data and for complex studies using multiple sophisticated approaches and model systems); and putting together the manuscript, including writing and revising it for publication.

The Nature journals have long mandated the inclusion in our published papers of author contribution statements that outline the specific efforts of each listed author. Although we do not police how these statements are written, we advise granular explanation of the role of each author. This enhances transparency and fairness by requiring that all contributors are clearly credited for their individual efforts and that the specific aspects of the study are attributed to the relevant contributors, and acts as a safeguard against inappropriate authorship attribution, for instance to honor

or appease persons of perceived high status in a field or institution, who have not contributed substantially (or at all) to the work.

For global research studies that involve multi-region collaborations and/or work in resource-poor settings, we encourage establishing equitable partnerships with researchers from the relevant locations; awarding co-author status to all those who deserve authorship; and including an ‘ethics and inclusion statement’ in the paper that outlines compliance with the [Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings](#).

To remove ambiguity regarding the identity of individual researchers, we strongly recommend that all authors provide their [Open Researcher and Contributor Identifier \(ORCID\)](#) iDs and mandate it for corresponding authors. We also ask that author names, affiliations and contact details are maintained current throughout the editorial process and for final publication, with institutional email addresses always being the preferred means of communication. In cases where author names have changed post-publication, for instance because of religious conversion or gender transition, we provide the opportunity for name and other relevant identifiers to be corrected in the author’s published papers.

Authorship offers much deserved credit for one’s hard work, but also comes with responsibility. Each author is accountable not only for their own contributions but for the work as a whole and must have approved the original version of the manuscript and all subsequent revisions for submission to and publication by the journal. In addition, each co-author is responsible for ensuring that any issues that may arise regarding the study, including the integrity of the presented research, accuracy of conclusions and compliance with policy, are appropriately investigated and conclusively resolved. A related author responsibility is the disclosure of any relevant [competing interests](#), which is mandatory at submission and during peer-review and also in the form of a competing interests statement in the published paper. As such, large language models and other artificial-intelligence-based programs do not fulfil the requirements of authorship and should not be credited as authors.

Having corresponding author status comes with increased responsibilities. Chief among

these is ensuring that all co-authors have approved the study and agree on the author list, order and contributions statements, have provided current contact and competing interests information and agree with the manuscript’s submission to the journal. Co-author agreement must be obtained for any material change to the content of the manuscript or the list, order and contributions of co-authors for every subsequent version of the manuscript that is submitted to the journal. Thus, the corresponding author is responsible for ensuring that the above requirements have been met before submitting the manuscript; for mediating all communication between the journal and their co-authors during the editorial, peer-review and production process; and for being the point of contact for any questions or issues that may arise before or after publication. The responsibility of corresponding authors (and in cases of large collaborative efforts, of key senior members of each contributing author sub-group) extends to ensuring 1) that the findings reported in the paper faithfully reflect the original materials and computational code used, and the data generated in the course of the study; 2) that these materials, code and data were obtained and used in accordance with the reproducibility standards of the journal and field of the study, and comply with institutional, country and journal guidelines and policies; 3) that the original materials, code and data are transparently reported, safeguarded and made available as required by the journal; and 4) that any mention of unpublished work or reproduction of previously published work in the manuscript is clearly signposted on submission with written permission from the original authors and/or rights holders.

What is the journal’s role in matters of authorship? Apart from clearly outlining our relevant policies in our [authorship page](#), the editors of *Nature Cancer* are always available to answer queries. However, we do not weigh in on matters of authorship, including who should be listed and in what order, and are not in a position to arbitrate and pass resolution on relevant disputes. Rather, we advise discussing such matters in the group of co-authors from the early stages of preparing the manuscript, especially prior to initial submission and before resubmission of subsequent versions if any

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# Editorial

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authorship changes, such as additions, removals and changes in co-author order, are being considered. If agreement cannot be reached, we advise consulting the relevant institutional

authorities. In general, any and all matters pertaining to authorship must be conclusively resolved before publication of the manuscript and it is in the best interests of all co-authors to

ensure that consensus is obtained for fair and deserved authorship attribution.

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