

# Scientific Authorship: a thorny but important problem

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Science is a lot of fun, except when the fighting starts about authorship: who is an author on the paper and in what order? A lot has been written about this recently, and there is no “one size fits all” answer. The standards vary widely across disciplines, between laboratories, and unfortunately even within laboratories.

This 2011 Scientific American blog post from Janet Stemwedel nicely addresses the complexity of getting this right <http://bit.ly/1DLZU4G>

The policies put out by the ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors) are a reasonable start and can be adapted to a particular situation <http://bit.ly/1Ep6Tj8>

When I realized that lab members did not know that there was a process behind the decisions I make whenever we put together a manuscript, I decided to formulate a document that captures the current authorship policies in my laboratory, and it follows below:

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## Statement on Authorship Policies in the Vosshall Laboratory

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The purpose of this document is to explain my policies on authorship of papers produced by the Vosshall laboratory. I aim to maintain consistent standards for authoring papers, setting a high bar, and avoiding “honorary authorship,” or authorship for purely technical contributions.

**Subtraction test:** Authorship on Vosshall Lab papers indicates a significant contribution to a study as outlined below. The subtraction test will ask if the paper would be substantially weakened if an individual’s contribution were subtracted.

The following are examples of what qualifies for authorship:

1. Design of experiments and significant effort in carrying out experiments; interpretation, statistical analysis, and/or production of figures, writing and editing manuscript text.
2. Carrying out specialized experiments critical to the manuscript
3. Contributing a previously unpublished behavioral assay, reagent, or other component that required expending significant effort in development, optimization, and implementation and that would be published for the first time in this paper.

The following are examples of what would NOT qualify you for authorship:

1. Purely technical contributions with no contribution to study design, interpretation, or statistical analysis
2. Training in or sharing of techniques or assays that will be published in your own studies and that do not require significant effort on your part to share
3. Providing funding
4. Providing access to equipment
5. Administrative, secretarial, or laboratory support assistance

**Process:** As head of the laboratory, I make the final decision on who qualifies for authorship. Students and postdocs should NOT make promises of authorship to lab members at any time. If we are involved in an external collaboration, this guidance is even more important. If you are approached with questions about authorship, please direct the person to come speak to me immediately. Authorship decisions are made by me in consultation with the first author(s) of the study at the time that the paper is being prepared for submission. Together we will review the contributions of everyone who contributed at all levels to the study. I may consult directly with those involved to clarify their contributions. The subtraction test will be performed and the relative contributions of secondary authors will be decided. Secondary authors will be listed in their order of contribution. In cases where there are two primary authors, they may be listed as co-first authors with shared contribution. In other cases, one author may be listed first, the other last, with me listed as second to last with corresponding author status. In cases where there are more than two primary authors, they may be listed alphabetically with shared contribution.

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