Editors cannot police author or contributor listings for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors. The COPE Flowchart ‘Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript’, https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.18 suggests actions for these situations. The following points are designed to help editors be alert for inappropriate authorship and spot warning signs which may indicate problems.

Type of authorship problems

A ghost author is someone who is omitted from an authorship list despite qualifying for authorship. This is not necessarily the same as a ghost writer, since omitted authors often perform other roles, in particular data analysis. Gøtzsche et al.¹ have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted from papers reporting industry funded trials. If a professional writer has been involved with a publication, it will depend on the authorship criteria being used whether they fulfil the criteria to be listed as an author. Using the ICMJE criteria for research papers, medical writers usually do not qualify as authors, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A guest or gift author is someone who is listed as an author despite not qualifying for authorship. Guests are generally people brought in to make the list look more impressive (despite having little or no involvement with the research or publication). Gift authorship often involves mutual professional enhancement (ie, including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs).

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References


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