COPE’s Core Practice on Authorship and Contributorship states: “Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship as well as processes for managing potential disputes” (see https://cope.onl/authorship-2).

Although editors may not always be able to individually monitor author or contributor listings for every submission, they may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete (eg, involves ghost authorship) or that undeserving authors have been added (eg, includes guest or gift authorship). This guidance document is designed to alert editors to potential warning signs of inappropriate authorship and prevent future authorship problems at the manuscript submission stage.

### Signs that Might Indicate Authorship Problems

- **Industry funded study with no authors from sponsor company**: This may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the original protocol may help determine the role of employees.

- **Name on author list known to be from unrelated research area**: This may indicate guest authorship.

- **Unspecified role in acknowledgements**: Individual thanked without a specific contribution.

- **Unfeasibly long or short author list**: For example, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author.

- **Questionable roles of contributors**: For example, it appears that no one drafted the paper or analysed the data.

- **Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers’ comments**: Consider that this may be legitimate if author has used language editing services.

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- **For example, a department head is listed as last author in many research papers**: Consider if this is legitimate.

- **Individually thanked without a specific contribution**: Consider that this may be legitimate if author has used language editing services.

- **Unfeasibly long or short author list**: For example, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author.

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### Best Practice to Prevent Authorship Problems

1. **Policies**: Adopt policies that allow for transparency around who contributed to the submitted work and in what capacity.

2. **Declarations**: Facilitate awareness of emerging standards for attribution (eg, ORCID and CRediT).

3. **Processes**: Check for and follow up unusual patterns of behaviour that may suggest authorship problems.
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References


2. ICMJE. Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals. May 2022. https://b.link/icmje-7
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