



FHMRI authorship advice

The following is a brief guide for FHMRI members, especially Early- and Mid-Career Researchers, on authorship in published scientific research. Authorship in published research is the primary currency of our careers. As such it is important to understand what constitutes authorship, how authorship should be discussed, and how decisions are made regarding position of authors in a publication.

A number of guidelines around this issue currently exist, including from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). One key aspect in their authorship guidelines includes the following on inclusion criteria for authorship:

“While authorship conventions vary across disciplines, a significant intellectual or scholarly contribution must include one and should include a combination of two or more of the following:

- conception and design of the project or output
- acquisition of research data where the acquisition has required significant intellectual judgement, planning, design, or input
- contribution of knowledge, where justified, including Indigenous knowledge
- analysis or interpretation of research data
- drafting significant parts of the research output or critically revising it so as to contribute to its interpretation”.

We advise that open discussions are had around authorship at any stage of a project, and that it is good to discuss what warrants first author position with your supervisor to avoid confusion and dispute later. Such conversations must, of course, occur before the work is published.

Regarding order of authorship:

Having established authorship then the order of authorship should be discussed, as first authorship and senior/last authorship carry important value and contribute to a researcher’s track record. The order of authors in between is not so important in terms of track record.

1. First authorship usually is assigned to a researcher who has directly conducted the bulk of the research and has contributed significant intellectual judgement, planning, design, or input. A first author most often plays a major role in writing the output. It is their project essentially.
2. Shared or co- first authorship is appropriate where two researchers have contributed equally to the generation of the bulk of the data and have contributed significant intellectual judgement, planning, design, or input. Shared or co- first authors most often play a major role in writing the output.
3. Senior/last author is appropriate where a researcher has led, conceived and designed the study and played a major role in writing the output and/or worked closely with the first author to contribute to the intellectual content and direction of the writing output.
4. Shared or co- senior/last author is appropriate where two researchers have contributed equally to leading the research, the concept and design of the study and played a major role in writing the output and/or worked closely with the first author to contribute to the intellectual content and direction of the writing output.



It is recommended the authorship order be discussed early as a study is being conducted to provide clarity. Perceptions of relative contribution can differ between parties involved in research collaborations. This can be clarified with greater ease if discussed early.