

Acknowledgements: When and How to Give Them

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The matter of authorship is an important consideration when professional collaborations result in journal publication. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) provides two major reasons: "Authorship confers credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications. Authorship also implies responsibility and accountability for published work."

Author and non-author contributors

ICJME has developed 4 [criteria](#) for inclusion of authors:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

If fewer than four of the criteria are met, ICJME recommends [acknowledgement](#). Its site includes a section, "Non-Author Contributors" that outlines single and group contributions whose activities alone (without other contributions) do not qualify a contributor for authorship. Because acknowledgement may imply endorsement, ICJME also advises that editors require corresponding authors to obtain written permission from all acknowledged individuals.

Succinct recommendations are provided in the author resources section of the [Journal of Biological Chemistry](#) website, advising discussion of authorship in the early stages of the research to publication cycle: "Agree on authorship before writing the manuscript. Authorship is based on substantial contributions." This agreement is key: for example, librarians who are part of a systematic review team usually meet the requirements for authorship, given the substantial contribution they make in the acquisition of the data that makes the review possible.

What to include in acknowledgements

Journals' author instructions vary in the detail provided for what is appropriate in an article's acknowledgement (credits) section. In a nutshell, these are often statements regarding sources of direct financial support, and recognition of personal assistance. Examples can be found in

Journal of Virology and *Journal of General Physiology*.

Professional organizations' style manuals may provide guidance. For example, the [AMA Manual of Style](#) (10th edition) includes this brief synopsis: "Acknowledgments typically are used to list grant or funding support, donors of equipment or supplies, technical assistance, and important specific contributions from individuals who do not qualify for authorship..."

Regarding the financial support information contained in an acknowledgement, government and private funders often outline specific requirements and formats for acknowledging funding in research publications as well as other products. See: [NIH's Communicating and Acknowledging Federal Funding](#).

Publishing styles and strategies

When submitting a manuscript, you should consult recommended style and other guidelines specific to the publication. Check out this site curated by University of Toledo's Mulford Health Sciences Library, which provides links to the [instructions to authors sites](#) for over 6,000 journals in the health and life sciences. All links are to "primary sources" - that is, to publishers and organizations with editorial responsibilities for the titles. Instructions include preferred formats for author listings and acknowledgement statements.

With a little preparation and consultation, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out who's worthy of an authorship credit and who deserves an acknowledgment. Crediting where due fosters good research practices and the development of ongoing, fruitful collaborations.
