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# Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals

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## I. ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Purpose of the Recommendations

ICMJE developed these recommendations to review best practice and ethical standards in the conduct and reporting of research and other material published in medical journals, and to help authors, editors, and others involved in peer review and biomedical publishing create and distribute accurate, clear, reproducible, unbiased medical journal articles. The recommendations may also provide useful insights into the medical editing and publishing process for the media, patients and their families, and general readers.

### B. Who Should Use the Recommendations?

These recommendations are intended primarily for use by authors who might submit their work for publication to ICMJE member journals. Many non-ICMJE journals voluntarily use these recommendations (see [www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations/](http://www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations/)). The ICMJE encourages that use but has no authority to monitor or enforce it. In all cases, authors should use these recommendations along with individual journals' instructions to authors. Authors should also consult guidelines for the re-

porting of specific study types (e.g., the CONSORT guidelines for the reporting of randomized trials); see [www.equator-network.org](http://www.equator-network.org).

Journals that follow these recommendations are encouraged to incorporate them into their instructions to authors and to make explicit in those instructions that they follow ICMJE recommendations. Journals that wish to be identified on the ICMJE website as following these recommendations should notify the ICMJE secretariat at [www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations/journal-listing-request-form/](http://www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations/journal-listing-request-form/). Journals that in the past have requested such identification but who no longer follow ICMJE recommendations should use the same means to request removal from this list.

The ICMJE encourages wide dissemination of these recommendations and reproduction of this document in its entirety for educational, not-for-profit purposes without regard for copyright, but all uses of the recommendations and document should direct readers to [www.icmje.org](http://www.icmje.org) for the official, most recent version, as the ICMJE updates the recommendations periodically when new issues arise.

### C. History of the Recommendations

The ICMJE has produced multiple editions of this document, previously known as the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (URMs). The URM was first published in 1978 as a way of standardizing manuscript format and preparation across journals. Over the years, issues in publishing that went well beyond manuscript preparation arose, resulting in the development of separate statements, up-dates to the document, and its renaming as "Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals" to reflect its broader scope. Previous versions of the document may be found in the "Archives" section of [www.icmje.org](http://www.icmje.org).

## II. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUTHORS, CONTRIBUTORS, REVIEWERS, EDITORS, PUBLISHERS, AND OWNERS

### A. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors

#### 1. Why Authorship Matters

Authorship confers credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications. Authorship also implies responsibility and accountability for published work. The following recommendations are intended to ensure that contributors who have made substantive intellectual contributions to a paper are given credit as authors, but also that contributors credited as authors understand their role in taking responsibility and being accountable for what is published.

Because authorship does not communicate what contributions qualified an individual to be an author, some journals now request and publish information about the contributions of each person named as having participated in a submitted study, at least for original research. Editors

are strongly encouraged to develop and implement a contributorship policy. Such policies remove much of the ambiguity surrounding contributions, but leave unresolved the question of the quantity and quality of contribution that qualify an individual for authorship. The ICMJE has thus developed criteria for authorship that can be used by all journals, including those that distinguish authors from other contributors.

#### 2. Who Is an Author?

The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
4. 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.

In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work he or she has done, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work. In addition, authors should have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors.

All those designated as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, and all who meet the four criteria should be identified as authors. Those who do not meet all four criteria should be acknowledged—see Section II.A.3 below. These authorship criteria are intended to reserve the status of authorship for those who deserve credit and can take responsibility for the work. The criteria are not intended for use as a means to disqualify colleagues from authorship who otherwise meet authorship criteria by denying them the opportunity to meet criterion #s 2 or 3. Therefore, all individuals who meet the first criterion should have the opportunity to participate in the review, drafting, and final approval of the manuscript.

The individuals who conduct the work are responsible for identifying who meets these criteria and ideally should do so when planning the work, making modifications as appropriate as the work progresses. We encourage collaboration and co-authorship with colleagues in the locations where the research is conducted. It is the collective responsibility of the authors, not the journal to which the work is submitted, to determine that all people named as authors meet all four criteria; it is not the role of journal editors to determine who qualifies or does not qualify for authorship or to arbitrate authorship conflicts. If agreement cannot be reached about who qualifies for authorship, the institution(s) where the work was performed, not the journal editor, should be asked to investigate. The criteria used to determine the order in which authors are listed on the byline may vary, and are to be decided collectively by the

author group and not by editors. If authors request removal or addition of an author after manuscript submission or publication, journal editors should seek an explanation and signed statement of agreement for the requested change from all listed authors and from the author to be removed or added.

The corresponding author is the one individual who takes primary responsibility for communication with the journal during the manuscript submission, peer review, and publication process. The corresponding author typically ensures that all the journal's administrative requirements, such as providing details of authorship, ethics committee approval, clinical trial registration documentation, and disclosures of relationships and activities, are properly completed and reported, although these duties may be delegated to one or more coauthors. The corresponding author should be available throughout the submission and peer-review process to respond to editorial queries in a timely way, and should be available after publication to respond to critiques of the work and cooperate with any requests from the journal for data or additional information should questions about the paper arise after publication. Although the corresponding author has primary responsibility for correspondence with the journal, the ICMJE recommends that editors send copies of all correspondence to all listed authors.

When a large multi-author group has conducted the work, the group ideally should decide who will be an author before the work is started and confirm who is an author before submitting the manuscript for publication. All members of the group named as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, including approval of the final manuscript, and they should be able to take public responsibility for the work and should have full confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the work of other group authors. They will also be expected as individuals to complete disclosure forms.

Some large multi-author groups designate authorship by a group name, with or without the names of individuals. When submitting a manuscript authored by a group, the corresponding author should specify the group name if one exists, and clearly identify the group members who can take credit and responsibility for the work as authors. The byline of the article identifies who is directly responsible for the manuscript, and MEDLINE lists as authors whichever names appear on the byline. If the byline includes a group name, MEDLINE will list the names of individual group members who are authors or who are collaborators, sometimes called non-author contributors, if there is a note associated with the byline clearly stating that the individual names are elsewhere in the paper and whether those names are authors or collaborators.

### **3. Non-Author Contributors**

Contributors who meet fewer than all 4 of the above criteria for authorship should not be listed as authors, but

they should be acknowledged. Examples of activities that alone (without other contributions) do not qualify a contributor for authorship are acquisition of funding; general supervision of a research group or general administrative support; and writing assistance, technical editing, language editing, and proofreading. Those whose contributions do not justify authorship may be acknowledged individually or together as a group under a single heading (e.g., "Clinical Investigators" or "Participating Investigators"), and their contributions should be specified (e.g., "served as scientific advisors," "critically reviewed the study proposal," "collected data," "provided and cared for study patients," "participated in writing or technical editing of the manuscript").

Because acknowledgment may imply endorsement by acknowledged individuals of a study's data and conclusions, editors are advised to require that the corresponding author obtain written permission to be acknowledged from all acknowledged individuals.

### **B. Disclosure of Financial and Non-Financial Relationships and Activities, and Conflicts of Interest**

Public trust in the scientific process and the credibility of published articles depend in part on how transparently an author's relationships and activities, directly or topically related to a work, are handled during the planning, implementation, writing, peer review, editing, and publication of scientific work.

The potential for conflict of interest and bias exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as patients' welfare or the validity of research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain). Perceptions of conflict of interest are as important as actual conflicts of interest.

Individuals may disagree on whether an author's relationships or activities represent conflicts. Although the presence of a relationship or activity does not always indicate a problematic influence on a paper's content, perceptions of conflict may erode trust in science as much as actual conflicts of interest. Ultimately, readers must be able to make their own judgments regarding whether an author's relationships and activities are pertinent to a paper's content. These judgments require transparent disclosures. An author's complete disclosure demonstrates a commitment to transparency and helps to maintain trust in the scientific process.

Financial relationships (such as employment, consultancies, stock ownership or options, honoraria, patents, and paid expert testimony) are the most easily identifiable, the ones most often judged to represent potential conflicts of interest and thus the most likely to undermine the credibility of the journal, the authors, and science itself. Other interests may also represent or be perceived as conflicts, such as personal relationships or rivalries, academic competition, and intellectual beliefs.

Authors should avoid entering into agreements with study sponsors, both for-profit and nonprofit, that interfere

with authors' access to all of the study's data or that interfere with their ability to analyze and interpret the data and to prepare and publish manuscripts independently when and where they choose. Policies that dictate where authors may publish their work violate this principle of academic freedom. Authors may be required to provide the journal with the agreements in confidence.

Purposeful failure report those relationships or activities specified on the journal's disclosure form is a form of misconduct, as is discussed in Section III.B.

#### **1. Participants**

All participants in the peer-review and publication process—not only authors but also peer reviewers, editors, and editorial board members of journals—must consider and disclose their relationships and activities when fulfilling their roles in the process of article review and publication.

##### **a. Authors**

When authors submit a manuscript of any type or format they are responsible for disclosing all relationships and activities that might bias or be seen to bias their work. The ICMJE has developed a Disclosure Form to facilitate and standardize authors' disclosures. ICMJE member journals require that authors use this form, and ICMJE encourages other journals to adopt it.

##### **b. Peer Reviewers**

Reviewers should be asked at the time they are asked to critique a manuscript if they have relationships or activities that could complicate their review. Reviewers must disclose to editors any relationships or activities that could bias their opinions of the manuscript, and should recuse themselves from reviewing specific manuscripts if the potential for bias exists. Reviewers must not use knowledge of the work they're reviewing before its publication to further their own interests.

##### **c. Editors and Journal Staff**

Editors who make final decisions about manuscripts should recuse themselves from editorial decisions if they have relationships or activities that pose potential conflicts related to articles under consideration. Other editorial staff members who participate in editorial decisions must provide editors with a current description of their relationships and activities (as they might relate to editorial judgments) and recuse themselves from any decisions in which an interest that poses a potential conflict exists. Editorial staff must not use information gained through working with manuscripts for private gain. Editors should regularly publish their own disclosure statements and those of their journal staff. Guest editors should follow these same procedures.

Journals should take extra precautions and have a stated policy for evaluation of manuscripts submitted by individuals involved in editorial decisions. Further guidance is available from COPE ([https://publicationethics.org/files/A\\_Short\\_Guide\\_to\\_Ethical\\_Editing.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/A_Short_Guide_to_Ethical_Editing.pdf)) and WAME (<http://wame.org/conflict-of-interest-in-peer-reviewed-medical-journals>).

#### **2. Reporting Relationships and Activities**

Articles should be published with statements or supporting documents, such as the ICMJE Disclosure Form, declaring:

- Authors' relationships and activities; and
- Sources of support for the work, including sponsor names along with explanations of the role of those sources if any in study design; collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; writing of the report; any restrictions regarding the submission of the report for publication; or a statement declaring that the supporting source had no such involvement or restrictions regarding publication; and
- Whether the authors had access to the study data, with an explanation of the nature and extent of access, including whether access is ongoing.

To support the above statements, editors may request that authors of a study sponsored by a funder with a proprietary or financial interest in the outcome sign a statement, such as "I had full access to all of the data in this study and I take complete responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis."

#### **C. Responsibilities in the Submission and Peer-Review Process**

##### **1. Authors**

Authors should abide by all principles of authorship and declaration of relationships and activities detailed in section II.A and B of this document.

##### **a. Predatory or Pseudo-Journals**

A growing number of entities are advertising themselves as "scholarly medical journals" yet do not function as such. These journals ("predatory" or "pseudo-journals") accept and publish almost all submissions and charge article processing (or publication) fees, often informing authors about this after a paper's acceptance for publication. They often claim to perform peer review but do not and may purposefully use names similar to well established journals. They may state that they are members of ICMJE but are not (see [www.icmje.org](http://www.icmje.org) for current members of the ICMJE) and that they follow the recommendations of organizations such as the ICMJE, COPE and WAME. Researchers must be aware of the existence of such entities and avoid submitting research to them for publication. Authors have a responsibility to evaluate the integrity, history, practices and reputation of the journals to which they submit manuscripts. Guidance from various organizations is available to help identify the characteristics of rep-