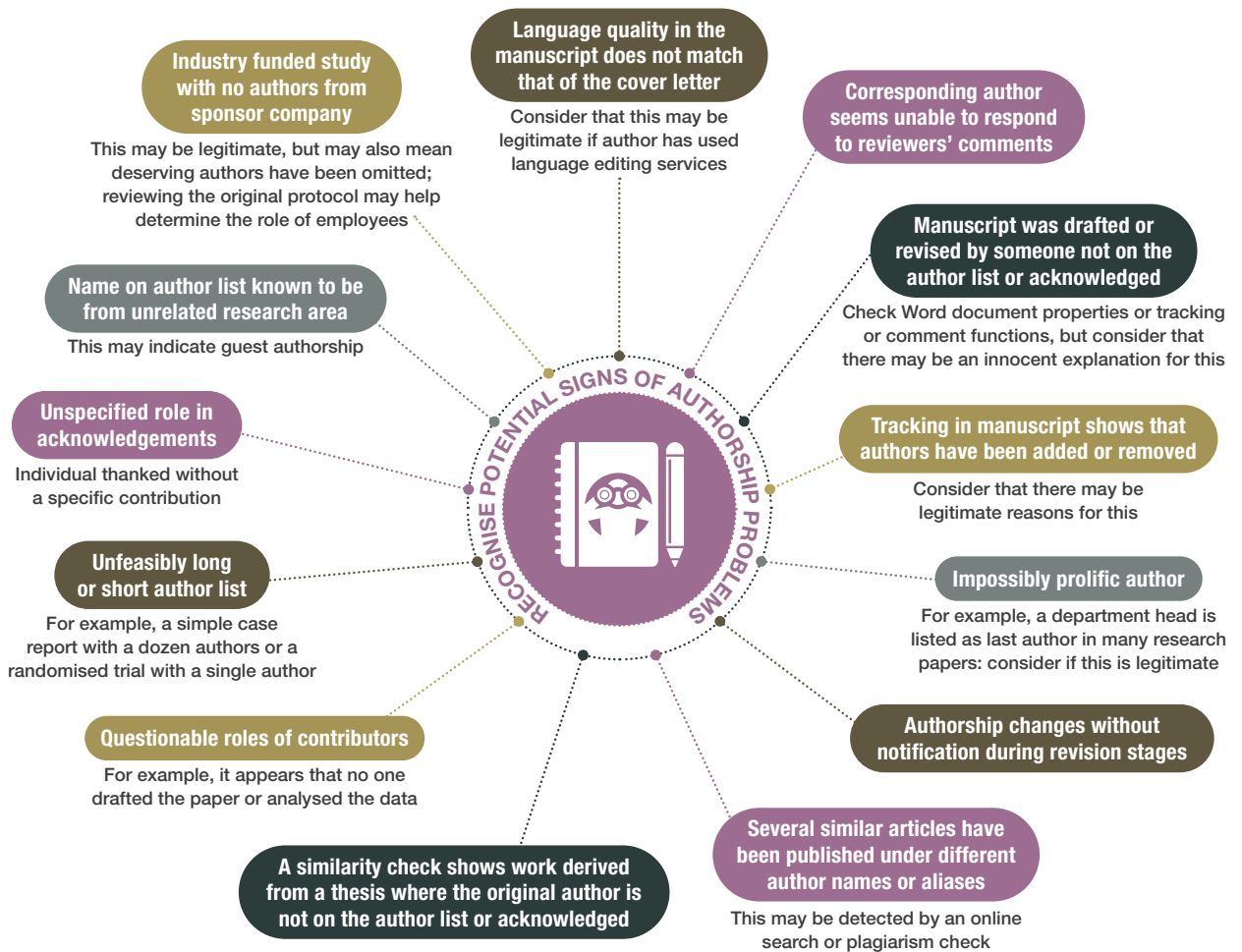


HOW TO RECOGNISE POTENTIAL AUTHORSHIP PROBLEMS

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



BEST PRACTICE TO PREVENT AUTHORSHIP PROBLEMS



Cite this as:
COPE Council.
COPE Flowcharts and infographics – How to recognise potential authorship problems – English. <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.22>
©2023 Committee on Publication Ethics (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) publicationethics.org
Version 2: April 2023.



TYPES OF AUTHORSHIP PROBLEMS

The presence of one or more of the above warning signs may indicate authorship problems or misconduct.

A **ghost author** is someone who is omitted or deleted from an author list despite qualifying for authorship. A ghost author is not necessarily the same as a ghost (unacknowledged) writer, because omitted authors may have performed other roles, in particular data analysis, and might have been named in an acknowledgement instead of the author list. Gøtzsche *et al*¹ have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted as authors from papers reporting industry funded trials. If a professional writer has been involved with a publication, the authorship criteria being used will determine whether they qualify as an author. According to the authorship criteria of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors,² medical writers would not usually qualify as authors in primary research papers, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A **guest or gift author** is someone who is listed as an author despite not fulfilling the authorship criteria being used. A **guest author** is a person who is added, with or without their knowledge, to make the author list look more impressive despite having no involvement with the research. A **gift author** is a person who did not make a significant contribution to the research or publication (and could have instead been acknowledged for their role) or someone not involved with the research who is added as a favour or out of appreciation or perceived courtesy. Gift authorship is often transactional and bestowed for the purpose of mutual professional enhancement (eg, including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs or for other career benefits). Guest and gift authorship may overlap, such as when adding the name of a well known department head or supervisor unconnected with the research, in an attempt to take advantage of their status while gaining their favour.



Cite this as:
COPE Council.
COPE Flowcharts
and infographics –
How to recognise
potential authorship
problems – English.
[https://doi.org/
10.24318/cope.
2019.2.22](https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.22)



©2023 Committee
on Publication Ethics
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) 
publicationethics.org

Version 2: April 2023.



AUTHORSHIP AND
CONTRIBUTORSHIP

References

1. Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, *et al*. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. *PLoS Med* 2007;4:e19. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019> 
2. ICMJE. Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals. May 2022. <https://b.link/icmje-7> 

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. However, other types of authorship misconduct include naming fictitious characters or non-humans (eg, software) as authors; publishing coauthors’ work with or without their names but without their knowledge, permission, or agreement; and not disclosing authorship to conceal major conflicts of interest. Possible associated issues are forged authorship forms, plagiarism, systematic manipulation of the publishing process, and use of paper mills. The following are some preventive measures that can be taken.

1. Develop and publicise clear **policies** on: authorship eligibility criteria and (if applicable) author order, joint authorship positions; any limits on author number (eg, by article type); acknowledging non-author contributors (with their consent); and managing author disputes
2. Require routine **authorship declarations** from all authors and require the corresponding author to declare that all authors qualify for authorship and no authors have been omitted; encourage use of emerging standards for attribution, such as ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) identifiers; and obtain itemised author contributions (eg, using the CRedit or Contributor Roles Taxonomy system)
3. Adopt suitable document screening or checking **processes** to detect possible authorship problems at submission, copy email correspondence to all authors, follow relevant **COPE** flowcharts, and inform institutions when cases require investigation or involve possible misconduct

Relevant COPE Flowcharts:

Suspected ghost, guest, or gift authorship.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.18>

Request for addition of extra author before publication.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.8>

Request for removal of author before publication.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.9>

Plagiarism in a submitted manuscript.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.1>

Systematic manipulation of the publication process.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.23>

Further reading

COPE Discussion document on authorship.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.3.3>

COPE Discussion document on best practice in these publishing.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/LQU1h9US>

eLearning module on authorship (members only).

<https://cope.onl/elearn-authorship>

Siu-wai Leung. Promoting awareness of good authorship practice.

<https://cope.onl/authorship-awareness>

Seminar 2021: Ethical authorship versus fraudulent authorship.

<https://cope.onl/ethical-fraudulent>

COPE position statement on authorship and AI tools

<https://cope.onl/ai-authorship>

DeTora LM *et al.* Good Publication Practice (GPP) Guidelines for Company-Sponsored Biomedical Research: 2022 Update. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2022;175(9):1298-1304.

<https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M22-1460>

ORCID

<https://b.link/orcid-1>

CRedit

<https://b.link/CRedit-2>

Cite this as:

COPE Council.
COPE Flowcharts
and infographics –
How to recognise
potential authorship
problems – English.
<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.22>

©2023 Committee
on Publication Ethics
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

publicationethics.org

Version 2: April 2023.



AUTHORSHIP AND
CONTRIBUTORSHIP