



From the Editor

The Weight of a Name

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A Thought Experiment

The setup. Scientific writing improves with experience. Researcher’s publication count grows alongside their expertise. Thus, the quality of a manuscript should be predictable based on the number of publications of the authors. But whose experience actually counts?

Question. Let us consider three scenarios. Can the manuscript quality be predicted by:

1. The publication count of the first author alone,
2. The average publication count of all authors, or
3. The sum of publication count of all authors?

All these scenarios reveal something important about the role of the co-authors.

Scenario 1. In the context of PhD students, the first scenario predicts a low initial manuscript quality, revealing that the lead author has been left without the necessary support and supervision. The common excuse – “This is the first author’s article and part of a PhD project, therefore I cannot interfere with the writing” – may have some relevance in the summary of a doctoral thesis, but it has no merit whatsoever in the context of a scientific article. Every multi-authored paper is a collaborative work. If Scenario 1 explains manuscript quality better than the others, lazy co-authorship is the only logical conclusion.

Scenario 2. Better commitment can be deduced if the average publication count predicts quality more accurately than the first author’s record alone. However, this model still allows for “hibernating” co-authors. The marginal benefit of adding an author can still be zero if they are merely a name on a list rather than an active contributor.

Scenario 3. If the sum of all authors’ publication records predicts manuscript quality, we are looking at a healthy, functional collaboration. In this scenario, every added co-author improves the work according to their level of experience. This sounds like real collaboration, doesn’t it?

Authorship: A Merit, Not a Favor

The criteria. Silva Fennica adheres to four non-negotiable criteria for authorship, all of which must be fulfilled:

1. Substantial contribution to the design of the work, or the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data; and
2. Scientific writing or critical revision of the manuscript for intellectual content; and
3. Final approval of the version to be published; and
4. Accountability for all aspects of the work, ensuring its accuracy and integrity.

Securing funding, providing data alone, or holding administrative responsibilities do not constitute authorship. Authorship is a merit earned, not a favor exchanged.

Search your conscience. Look back at your previous co-authored works. Did you truly critically read the manuscript before submission? Did you double-check the line of deduction, the integrity of the data, and the statistical analyses? Were the terms and units coherent? Did you critically evaluate the context in which the research was presented? Did you scrutinize the tables and figures for hidden errors? Were the conclusions supported by the results?

Lack of critical reading is the pain point of collaborative publishing. Critical reading and rigorous revision are imperatives for meeting criteria 2, 3, and 4. It is hard work. Critically reviewing a single manuscript requires at least 3–10 hours of concentrated, often painful, thinking. But critical thinking is exactly what we, as scientists, are paid for.

When a paper has 3–8 senior co-authors, their collective critical revision **must** significantly improve the manuscript's quality. If it doesn't, we must ask: why are those names there?

Towards Better Science

Enhanced co-authorship is a shortcut to better science. Investing one full workday into the critical reading of a manuscript is a small price to pay, yet it is the fastest way to elevate the quality of our research outputs. This small step has a great impact, and it requires no new financing, no additional projects, and no restructuring of organizations.

It simply requires us to do the work.

Annamari Laurén
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