

EPA Best Practices for Designating Authorship

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Does this policy create new requirements for authorship on documents where previously EPA did not list authors or contributors?**

The best practices described in this document apply prospectively to any EPA work product where authorship is normally designated, including but not limited to journal articles, reports, presentations, posters, documentation of models or software, communication products, technical support documents, and guidance documents. This document does not create new requirements for designating authorship for previously un-authored documents.

- **What kinds of documents do the best practices apply to?**

Some examples are: journal articles, reports, presentations, posters, documentation of models or software, communication products, technical support documents, and guidance documents.

- **Are we now required to list contractors as authors?**

Project contributors who work under an EPA contract and are not federal employees are subject to the same authorship best practices as other members of the project team. Because naming contractors as authors could create the appearance of a contractor performing an inherently governmental function, the EPA Acquisition Regulations require the clauses specified in Appendix 2 of the Best Practices for Designating Authorship document to be included in any contract that could result in the publication of work performed under the contract. In addition, the text, "Contractor's role did not include establishing Agency policy," must also be included in any work product that lists authors who worked under an EPA contract.

- **What if I disagree with one or some of these best practices?**

These are best practices, not requirements. If you identify specific aspects of them that are problematic for your particular situation or more broadly, please write a clear concise summary of your concerns and send it to the Scientific Integrity Official. We will be revisiting the content of this document in late fall and welcome your concerns and feedback!

- **What if my manager is requiring that I make him/her an author and they do not meet the authorship criteria?**

This is called honorary or courtesy authorship and is a common authorship abuse. Authorship should not be given to an individual who does not meet the criteria for authorship. Authorship should not be provided to a senior figure who expects or demands it because he/she is in a position of authority (e.g. branch chief, division director, or office director) or controls the project's funding.

- **Our technicians just run machines and produce basic data. Why should I worry about them when I think about designating authorship?**

Technicians are subject to the same authorship best practices as all other members of a project team. A technician should be listed as an author if the technician fulfilled all of the authorship criteria described in Section 2 of the Best Practices for Designating Authorship. However, simply performing routine tasks does not qualify a technician for authorship.

The possibility of authorship can be a powerful incentive that enhances employee engagement. If a technician and their supervisor agree that the technician is a candidate for authorship on a work product, the supervisor should encourage the technician early in the project to engage in the full spectrum of intellectual activities that result in meeting all authorship criteria.

- **How can you plagiarize yourself?**

Self-plagiarism is the reuse of significant portions of one's own work without citing the original work. There are two distinct forms of self-plagiarism: text recycling and redundant publication.

Text recycling occurs when sections of the same text appear (usually unattributed) in more than one of the author's own work products. In some circumstances, a small amount of text recycling may be unavoidable. For example, the use of similar or identical phrases describing certain methods or techniques that are common to multiple work products may be unavoidable because there are a limited number of ways to describe them. In such circumstances, authors should cite the original work product when using the same or similar text. Authors should generally avoid text recycling. Where text recycling is unavoidable, however, authors must cite the original source.

Redundant (or duplicate) publication generally refers to the repeated publication of data or ideas without disclosing earlier publication of the material. Redundant publication of data without attribution is always unacceptable. Redundant publication wastes limited resources because it displaces the publication of novel scientific finding. Presentation of material already published or presented can also impede scientific progress because it prevents or delays the timely dissemination of new and potentially important scientific findings. Redundant publication can also lead to the distortion of scientific evidence through erroneous meta-analyses.

When a work product includes previously published material, the best practice is transparency – putting editors, meeting organizers, readers, and audiences on notice to exactly which portions of a work product are new and which are restated from elsewhere.

- **I have taken my name off publications in the past because EPA requirements were so onerous that I felt it was not fair to my co-authors to delay the work while it was being cleared and reviewed. It looks like this is ghost authorship. Why is this a problem?**

The designation of authorship plays a critical role in transparency by identifying who is responsible for the information and conclusions in EPA work products and how they were developed. A better solution is early communication of the processes and procedures necessary for the clearance and release of an EPA work product and associated timelines with co-authors and those who will be doing the clearing and reviewing.

- **Why is authorship designation important to scientific integrity?**

EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy encourages the publication and presentation of research findings and the communication of scientific information to the public. In addition, EPA's Principles of Scientific Integrity require that EPA employees represent and acknowledge the intellectual contributions of others in published work such as journal articles and technical reports and refrain from taking credit for work with which they were not materially involved. EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy also affirms the Agency's commitment to transparency in its interactions with the public. The designation of authorship plays a critical role in transparency by identifying who is responsible for the information and conclusions in EPA work products and how they were developed.

- **Who do I call with questions?**

Questions about designating authorship may be directed to the Agency's Scientific Integrity Official, your Deputy Scientific Integrity Official, or the Inspector General Hotline.

<https://www.epa.gov/osa/authorship-best-practices>

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