

Recommendations for safeguarding good scientific practice in the context of co-authorship

Executive Board of the Leibniz Association

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The following recommendations flesh out and supplement the authorship criteria set out in the relevant provisions of the Leibniz Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice and the Leibniz Code for Good Research Practice, with the aim of making it easier to trace and check responsibilities in co-authored publications. It strengthens fundamental due diligence in research, emphasizes the principle of shared responsibility for all the authors of a publication and reminds authors of their duty to make explicit mention of any divergence from this principle.¹

1. For all publications with more than two authors, the Leibniz Association recommends that researchers from Leibniz institutes document responsibilities for the individual contributions internally in a binding manner before the manuscript is submitted for publication – even in cases where this is not facilitated or required by the publication medium/place, or is only required in insufficient detail.
2. It is recommended that authors regard the documentation of responsibilities as an opportunity to reflect on the authorship standards, and that they complete the documentation at a sufficiently early stage of the publication process – at the latest when work starts on the manuscript of the joint publication.
3. Wherever possible, the process of documenting the responsibilities should take place with the explicit agreement of everyone involved and be carried out by authors with primary responsibility (lead or corresponding author), provided they are based at an institute of the Leibniz Association. A suitable storage location should be chosen to ensure that this record of responsibilities for individual contributions justifying authorship can be accessed in the event of a later conflict situation. Any questions about documentation methods should be addressed to the decentralised ombudsperson.

¹ “All authors agree on the final version of the work to be published. They share responsibility for the publication. Any divergence from this principle must be explicitly mentioned in the publication.” (Leibniz Code (2021), 2.8). According to the Leibniz Guidelines (2019), §2, para. 1 f), standards of good scientific practice include “ [...] taking responsibility, as an author of a scientific publication, for the content and presentation of the results and their discussion in general and explicitly identifying and justifying cases in which responsibility covers only a part of the publication.”

4. In cases where the main authors are external to the Leibniz Association, co-authors from within the Leibniz Association should act independently to ensure their responsibility is correctly defined in the publication and, if possible, make and document appropriate suggestions during the publication process.
5. Institutes should flesh out and implement these recommendations internally in collaboration with the relevant decentralised ombudspersons. The Leibniz Ombuds Committee and Leibniz Headquarters can offer support in an advisory capacity.