



## Responsible Conduct in Research Case Study: Publication & Authorship

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**RAs:** Lilly is a graduate student at the lab of Dr. Torr, an assistant professor of ecology who is also her advisor. She is preparing a manuscript for submission that is based on four experiments, two of them were carried out by Lilly, the other two by Marc, an RA, under Lilly's supervision. Lilly is not sure whether she should offer Marc co-authorship. This is unusual for Dr. Torr's lab. Dr. Torr says, former RAs might be disappointed when hearing that Marc has now been offered co-authorship. On the other hand, in another lab at the same institute, RAs are sometimes co-authors. Dr. Torr concludes, Lilly should decide by herself.

? Should Lilly offer co-authorship to Marc? Does your answer depend on whether Marc has ambitions to make a PhD and become a professor?

**Who decides about the final form of a manuscript?** Dr. Torr had not much to criticize on Lilly's first draft. Lilly therefore expects that Dr. Torr will be confident with the revised version of the manuscript. This time, however, Dr. Torr asks Lilly to make a lot of changes: "The manuscript is too long. You should shorten the *Introduction*, the *Materials and Methods* and the *Discussion*." Lilly is disappointed. She wonders why Dr. Torr didn't say that in the first place. Moreover, she doesn't want to shorten the manuscript. She argues, this would make it harder for readers to understand the content of the manuscript. Dr. Torr, however, emphasizes that journals are space-limited so the manuscript must be as short as possible. Lilly understands this but she doesn't agree with Dr. Torr what "as short as possible" means. She knows that Dr. Torr has more experience in writing manuscripts. She wonders, however, whether the point they don't agree upon is possibly just a matter of taste. She therefore asks Michael, a postdoc working in the same lab, for his opinion. After having read Lilly's manuscript, Michael says, you can either shorten the manuscript or let it as it is.

? What should Lilly do? Should she argue that she is the first author of the manuscript and therefore should have the final decision on what the manuscript should look like? Or should she shorten the manuscript and submit it in a form she isn't happy with? Are there other possible actions you can imagine?

**When should an advisor be co-author?** When Michael was hired by Dr. Torr as a postdoc, they agreed that he is going to work on a question Dr. Torr's lab has been investigating for years. Michael is interested in this question but after a while, he detects some exciting implications of his results for another topic. Michael is allowed to explore it further and is grateful for that. He knows that Dr. Torr is not interested in his new project and will not participate at it.

? Assume that Michael offers Dr. Torr co-authorship for every paper that will result from his research. Should Dr. Torr accept this offer?

? What if Michael does not offer co-authorship. Does Dr. Torr have a right to be co-author?

**Should an author remain an author?** Michael submitted a manuscript to *Ecology* with Ben, another postdoc at another lab, as the second author. The manuscript includes experiments that were carried out by Michael and a model that was developed by Ben. Ben's research does not overlap with Michael's very much. He developed the model because Michael asked him to and he knows Michael from college. Michael wouldn't have been able to develop the model by himself. The manuscript was rejected but the editor offers resubmission after the model has been excluded. The editor likes the manuscript but thinks the model is not necessary. Since Michael has the impression, the shortened manuscript has good odds to be accepted, he makes the suggested revisions. He knows that Ben's model could only be published in a theoretical journal with a low impact factor. Ben might not even be interested in writing such a paper.

? Should Ben remain co-author? Besides his comments on drafts, he had no direct influence on the revised manuscript.

**Are all authors responsible for misconduct?** Adam is another graduate student in Dr. Torr's lab. He is frustrated. Dr. Torr has not much time to advise him. Adam would need more advise. His experiments failed and he doesn't know why. The only way out he sees is to invent results. These "results" are included in a publication with Adam as the first author and Dr. Torr as the second one. Adam gets his degree and finds a non-scientific job. A couple of years later, the paper has been cited frequently but no other scientist was able to repeat the experiments. In fact, a lot of researchers now question the validity of the results. Adam eventually admits that the data are faked.

? Should Dr. Torr be made responsible for the misconduct as well? What is the role of the institute in this situation?