

A LACK OF ATTRIBUTION

When writing a manuscript, determining the order of authors can be difficult at times. Identifying the first and corresponding author is usually easy, but deciding who should be the second or third author can lead to debate and, occasionally, hard feelings. And then there are those who contribute materials or single experiments to a study: should they be authors, or should they be only acknowledged for their contributions? These situations create particular attribution challenges, but fortunately there are loose guidelines when it comes to author attributions, although interpretation of these guidelines varies.

Still, when someone contributes in an intellectual or technical fashion to a particular study, that person should be recognized either as an author or in a formal acknowledgment at the end of the article. For the longest time, I thought this was obvious, since author listings and Acknowledgments sections exist for this reason. So you can understand my surprise when I learned that for those working in core laboratories at universities and research institutes, this is not the norm. Often, core facility scientists providing technical support to researchers are often not even acknowledged within the manuscript.

One might suggest that core facility staff members are paid for their work, which should be sufficient reward. But while researchers usually do pay to use a core facility, it is also true that governmental grants to these facilities often reduce overall user costs. Given this, it only makes sense that any researcher using a core facility acknowledge that core and the federal funding received to defray research costs; this is critical information that helps funding agencies understand the extent and impact of core facility usage.

Another important consideration when it comes to acknowledging core laboratories is methods reporting. Knowing that researchers processed their samples or obtained sequence data from a core facility that uses standard workflows and operating procedures can help other scientists seeking to employ these methodologies or verify results.

In the end, attribution should be given to everyone involved in generating data, interpreting results, or funding a research study. Leaving out key players does nothing to further the scientific process. We hope that in the future all *BioTechniques* authors will mention use of core facilities in the Acknowledgments sections of their manuscripts. To this end, starting in November we will ask authors during final acceptance if they worked with a core laboratory.

We welcome any comments or questions regarding this new policy at bioeditor@biotechniques.com.

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