

James R. Wilson's Commentary on "Authorship Question"

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Authorship Question

It is improper and usually counterproductive to manipulate an article's byline in an attempt to influence the editorial review process. Such manipulation includes (i) suppressing the names of "ghost" coauthors against whom some potential editors or referees are thought to be adversely biased; and (ii) adding the names of prominent "guest" coauthors who are thought to enhance the article's prestige and credibility with some reviewers. At the stage of initial submission of an article for editorial review, some journals give the corresponding author the option to suggest the editor or the referees of the article; and some journals actually require such suggestions. Some journals also give the corresponding author the option to suggest individuals who should not be the editor or a referee for the article. However, the initial submission process is based on the fundamental principle of responsible authorship that all the actual contributors to the article are honestly disclosed. There are also practical grounds for abstaining from manipulations (i) and (ii). At the later stages of resubmission of a revised article or final submission of an accepted article, some journals require the corresponding author to provide the editor with a detailed justification for any changes in the article's authorship. It is an easily detectable breach of professional ethics to misrepresent or lie about the real reasons for such changes in authorship, and usually the editor can immediately reject the paper if those changes are judged to be questionable or improper.