

Hunt, R. 1991. Trying an authorship index. Nature, 352: 187.

Sir - Few issues in scientific life can now match authorship of collaborative work for its potential to distract and destroy. The use of bibliometric indices as performance indicators places great weight upon uncertain foundations. How does one compare senior versus junior, staff member versus visitor, money versus time, or backache versus headache versus heartache?

The unit in which I work uses a set of formal rules based upon a simple points table. The maximum score possible is 100 points. Each potential author is awarded the highest realistic score in each category; whoever achieves a total of 25 points is offered joint authorship in rank order of total score. In the event of ties, recent near-misses are considered; if none exists, alphabetical order is used.

The scheme is used mainly for experimental papers in plant ecology. A variant for theoretical studies has a 15-point scale for data-capture and a 25-point scale for specialist input. However, we have avoided too much tinkering because simplicity and generality are important goals. Preliminary experience with these rules has been encouraging - perhaps readers may wish to test them for themselves?

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COAUTHORSHIP SCORING SYSTEM

	<u>Intellectual input</u> (planning/designing/interpreting)
No contribution	0
One detailed discussion	5
Several detailed discussions	10
Correspondence or longer meetings	15
Substantial liaisons	20
Closest possible involvement	25

	<u>Practical Input: data-capture</u> (setting-up/observing/recording/abstracting)
No contribution	0
Small contribution	5
Moderate indirect contribution	10
Moderate direct contribution	15
Major indirect contribution	20
Major direct contribution	25

	<u>Practical input: beyond data-capture</u> (Data processing/organizing)
No contribution	0
Minor or brief assistance	5
Substantial or prolonged assistance	10

	<u>Specialist input from related fields</u>
No contribution	0
Brief or routine advice	5
Specially tailored assistance	10
Whole basis of approach	15

	<u>Literary input</u> (Contribution to first complete draft of manuscript)
No contribution	0
Edited others' material	5
Contributed small sections	10
Contributed moderate proportion	15
Contributed majority	20
Contributed virtually all	25