



EDITORIAL

First author: a prestigious position in academic publication

Sumarno Adi Subrata 

Author information

Department of Nursing, Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang, Indonesia

 adisubrata@ummgl.ac.id <https://doi.org/10.31603/nursing.v12i1.13092>

Abstract

The position of the first author in academic publishing is widely regarded as prestigious as it often symbolizes the primary contributor to the research process. This role is typically reserved for the researcher who has made the most significant contribution to the study including the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. The first author position is not just a title; it reflects the individual's dedication to the research and the extent of their involvement throughout the entire study process. It is often seen as a mark of academic excellence which highlight the individual's central role in advancing knowledge within their field. Being the first author brings increased visibility to the researcher, as their name appears prominently on the publication. Moreover, it often become the focal point in academic and professional circles. This recognition can significantly enhance a researcher's academic reputation which lead to further career opportunities such as job offers, invitations to speak at conferences, and potential collaborations. Moreover, the first author position can be crucial for young researchers or those early in their careers due to it can be a key factor in securing future funding or grants. However, the significance of the first author role is not without its challenges. In collaborative research, determining the rightful first author can become contentious, particularly in interdisciplinary studies involving multiple contributors with diverse skill sets. Additionally, issues surrounding authorship attribution can raise ethical questions, particularly if the order of authorship does not accurately reflect individual contributions. This paper explores these complexities and address the responsibilities tied to the first author position and its implications for career progression. In due course, the position of the first author is of paramount importance in the realm of academic publishing as it reflects both individual contribution and scholarly recognition.

Keywords: academic publishing, authorship order, career progression, first author, research contribution

The role of the first author in academic publication carries a prestigious weight which representing leadership, intellectual contribution, and scholarly recognition within the research community (Lapidow, & Scudder, 2019). This position is more than a mere name at the forefront of a publication; it reflects the individual who has significantly contributed to the conceptualization, execution, and articulation of the research (Bhattacharya, 2010). As the primary driver of the project, the first author typically initiates the study, refines the research questions, and ensures the methodological rigor that underpins the findings (Tarkang et al., 2017). This prominence serves as a badge of honor and establishes the individual as a leading expert in their respective field, having opportunities for collaboration, funding, and professional advancement. Being the first author implies a profound responsibility in ensuring the research's integrity and quality (Kambhampati & Maini, 2023). It is this individual who often shoulders the labor-intensive tasks of drafting the manuscript, integrating feedback from co-authors, and responding to reviewers' critiques. The intellectual labor behind this position involves synthesizing complex ideas into coherent narratives that are accessible and impactful to the intended audience. Furthermore, the first author's role extends beyond writing; they often oversee the research's practical aspects, such as data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Singhal & Kalra, 2021). The first author ensure that every step aligns with the study's objectives and ethical standards. From an academic standpoint, the first author position is often viewed as a key indicator of a researcher's capability and potential. In academia, metrics such as the number of first-author publications are frequently used to assess candidates for tenure, grants, and academic promotions (**Figure 1**). These publications demonstrate scholarly productivity and the ability to lead and innovate. Consequently, the first author's position serves as a cornerstone for building a strong academic reputation for early-career researchers and striving to establish their presence in competitive research environments (Giuliano, 2019). Collaboration plays a significant role in academic research, and the first author is often at the epicenter of these collaborative efforts (Saenz et al., 2024). They coordinate

with co-authors, mentors, and other contributors, then balance diverse perspectives and maintain the manuscript's coherence and focus. Effective communication skills and the ability to navigate complex team dynamics are essential traits for a first author, as these qualities ensure the successful execution of the project (Otto et al., 2023). Moreover, this role demands diplomacy and fairness in acknowledging contributions, as proper authorship attribution is crucial in upholding academic integrity and fostering trust among collaborators. The first author's journey is often fraught with challenges that test their resilience and commitment. Drafting a manuscript involves numerous revisions, often accompanied by critical feedback from co-authors, peer reviewers, and editors (Parasuraman et al., 2013). The iterative nature of this process requires perseverance and adaptability, as the first author must continuously refine their work to meet rigorous scholarly standards. Additionally, balancing the demands of first authorship with other academic and personal responsibilities can be daunting and underscoring the importance of time management and its prioritization.

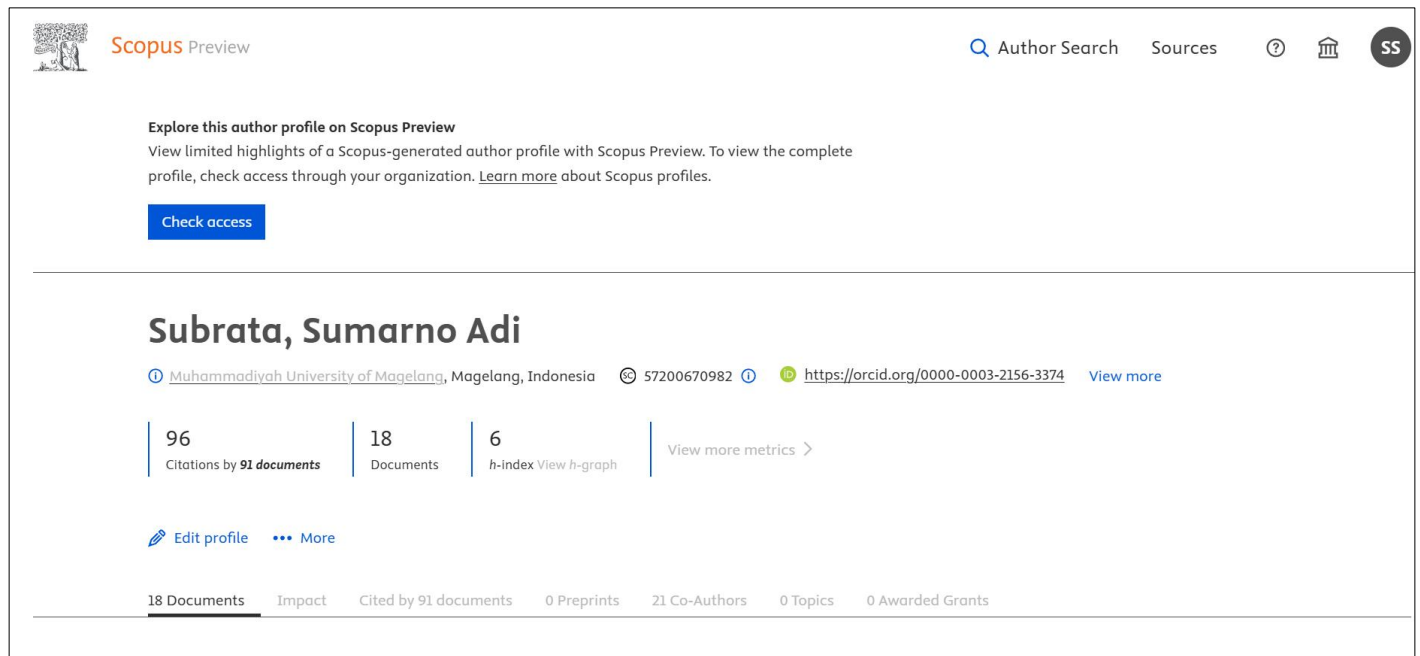


Figure 1. This account consists of 18 publications (2018-2025), 15 of which feature the author as the first author (27 January 2025). Additionally, there will be 2 more articles as the first author, which have already been accepted in Scopus-indexed journals. The list above will be updated soon.

Recognition as the first author also places an individual in the limelight, both within their research community and beyond (Song, 2017). This visibility brings opportunities to present findings at conferences, engage with stakeholders, and influence policy and practice in their field. However, with this recognition comes the expectation to defend and advocate for the research which addressing questions and critiques from peers. This dual role of author and advocate necessitates a deep understanding of the study and its broader implications because it reflects the position of thorough preparation and confidence. For early-career researchers, achieving first authorship can be a transformative milestone. It validates their expertise and dedication along with serves as a stepping stone for future endeavors. First authorship often opens doors to leadership roles in research consortia, editorial boards, and professional societies (Phillippi et al., 2018). It also enhances the researcher's curriculum vitae which making them a strong candidate for competitive grants, fellowships, and academic appointments (Ferreira, 2022). In this sense, the first author's position is a catalyst for professional growth and recognition. Ethical considerations are paramount in determining first authorship. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines emphasize that the first author must have made substantial contributions to the study's conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation (Šupak-Smolčić et al., 2015). Adherence to these principles ensures that the first author's position is awarded based on merit rather than arbitrary decisions (Zimba & Gasparyan, 2020). Furthermore, discussions about authorship should occur early in the research process to prevent conflicts and ensure transparency. Clear agreements on roles and contributions foster a collaborative environment and uphold the credibility of the research.

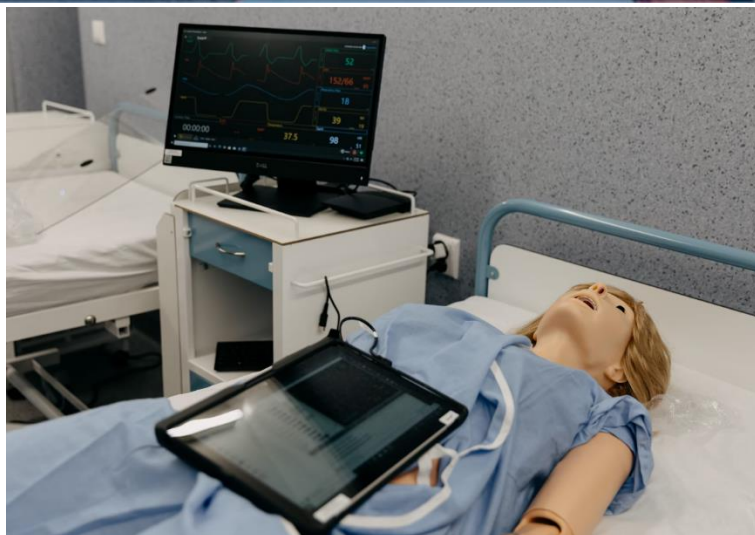


Figure 2. Illustration of nursing research
(Courtesy of www.unsplash.com).

The evolution of multidisciplinary research has further elevated the importance of the first author. In projects that span multiple fields, the first author often acts as a bridge and integrate knowledge from diverse domains to create a unified framework (Kuper et al., 2023). This role requires subject-matter expertise and the ability to communicate across disciplines which highlight the versatility and leadership of the first author. As science becomes increasingly collaborative, the ability to navigate such complexities will define the future of first authorship. In the field of nursing, publication is a crucial aspect of professional development and knowledge dissemination (**Figure 2**). First authorship is often seen as a significant milestone which reflecting a nurse's contributions to research and scholarship. However, the journey to becoming a first author is influenced by various facilitators and barriers. Understanding these factors is essential for aspiring

nurse researchers and educators who aim to contribute meaningfully to the body of nursing literature.

One of the primary facilitators of becoming a first author in nursing publications is the presence of supportive mentors. Mentorship plays a vital role in guiding novice researchers through the complexities of the publication process (da Silva Souza et al., 2023). For instance, a seasoned nurse researcher may provide guidance on developing research questions, designing studies, and navigating the submission process. This mentorship enhances the skills of the mentee and increases their confidence in pursuing publication. A study highlighted that mentorship positively impacts the publication rates of nursing professionals which demonstrated the importance of collaborative relationships in academia (Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Access to research resources is another critical facilitator. Institutions that prioritize research often provide their staff with access to databases, journals, and funding opportunities (Fleming et al., 2021). For example, a nursing department with a dedicated research fund can support projects that lead to publishable results. Additionally, workshops on research methodologies and writing can empower nurses to engage in scholarly activities. Institutions that set a research-friendly environment can create a culture where nurses feel encouraged to contribute to the literature; thus, increasing the likelihood of achieving first authorship. Collaboration among healthcare professionals is a significant facilitator of first authorship. Interdisciplinary research teams can enhance the quality and scope of nursing studies (Brown et al., 2023). For instance, a nurse may collaborate with physicians, social workers, and researchers from other disciplines to address complex health issues. Such collaborations enrich the research design and increase the visibility of nursing contributions within broader healthcare discussions. Working alongside other professionals can take on leadership roles in research projects which positioning as first authors on resulting publications. Institutional support plays a pivotal role in facilitating first authorship (Slowe, 2018). Policies that recognize and reward research efforts can motivate nurses to pursue publication. For example, institutions that include publication as a criterion for promotion and tenure demonstrate a commitment to scholarly work. This recognition can incentivize nurses to engage in research activities and their efforts will be acknowledged. Furthermore, institutional resources such as online databases can provide essential support in the publication process due to it make easier for nurses to achieve first authorship (Oermann et al., 2021).

Despite the facilitators, several barriers hinder nurses from becoming first authors. One significant barrier is the lack of time due to heavy workloads (Alotaibi, 2023). Many nurses juggle multiple responsibilities, including patient care, administrative duties, and continuing education. For instance, a nurse working in a busy hospital may find it challenging to allocate time for research and writing amidst their demanding schedule. This time constraint can lead to missed opportunities for publication, as the pressure of daily responsibilities often takes precedence over scholarly activities. Another barrier is the limited research training that many nurses receive during their education (Wu et al., 2019). While nursing programs emphasize clinical skills, they may not adequately prepare students for research activities. For example, a newly graduated nurse may lack the necessary skills in data analysis, research design, or academic writing. This gap in training can discourage nurses from pursuing publication, as they may feel unprepared to navigate the complexities of the research process.

Addressing the barrier above requires a concerted effort to include research methodologies in nursing curricula which ensuring that the future nurses are equipped to engage in scholarly work (**Figure 3**). The fear of rejection from journals is a psychological barrier that can deter nurses from submitting their work for publication (Palmer, 1990). Many nurses may experience anxiety about the quality of their research or the potential for criticism from peer reviewers. For instance, a nurse who has invested significant time and effort into a study may hesitate to submit their manuscript which fearing it will be rejected (Ali, 2010). This fear can lead to procrastination or avoidance of the submission process altogether. Encouraging a culture that views rejection as a learning opportunity rather than a failure can help mitigate this barrier and empower nurses to pursue publication. A lack of awareness regarding the publication process can also serve as a barrier to first authorship. Many nurses may not fully understand the requirements for submitting a manuscript. For example, they may be unfamiliar with journal selection, formatting requirements, and submission guidelines and submission protocols. This lack of knowledge can discourage nurses from attempting to publish their research. Providing education and resources can help demystify this aspect of academic work, and create a supportive environment with resources and facilitators that can promote first authorship in nursing. Encouraging collaboration between nursing organizations, educational institutions, and healthcare organizations can also be beneficial. Improving a supportive environment, providing adequate resources, and encouraging nurses to take on leadership roles in research and contribute to the publication landscape for nurses will benefit individual nurses and the nursing profession as a whole.

In conclusion, the first author's position is a testament to academic excellence as it represents the individual's leadership, intellectual contributions, and dedication to advancing knowledge. It is a role that comes with significant responsibilities and challenges but also offers unparalleled opportunities for professional growth and recognition. As the cornerstone of academic publication, first authorship remains a coveted and prestigious achievement. This position denotes the culmination of scholarly effort and the promise of future innovation. However, being a second, third, or fourth author in a publication is acceptable as long as they are committed to working collaboratively with the lead author. As in many cases, unfortunately again, some second or fourth authors are just adding their names without contributing to the research or publication. This is often a concern in the publication process. They just want their names on the article to increase the number of publications on their Scopus account (for example), without paying attention to the topic of interest in the research. Some researchers are not focused on publication; sometimes they work on this topic, sometimes on that one, and often on another topic altogether. They lack consistency or interest in a single publication topic. For this reason, the first author needs to ensure that everyone listed in the publication has made a meaningful contribution to the work.

Editor's declaration

This editorial can serve as valuable motivation for journal editors to enhance their productivity and strive to be the first author on their accepted manuscripts.

AI statement

The editor confirm that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the writing of this work.

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None.



Figure 3. Illustration of book in nursing research (Documented by lead Editor).

Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the editor.

Competing interests

The editor declares no competing interest.

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Editor's insight

Key points

- The first author position signifies the individual who has played a leading role in the research.
- Serving as the first author enhances professional visibility, academic credibility, and opens opportunities for collaboration.
- The first author is responsible for ensuring the quality, accuracy, and ethical standards of the research.

Emerging nursing avenues

- What are the key responsibilities and contributions required to achieve the position of the first author in an academic publication?
- How does being the first author impact a researcher's career advancement and professional recognition within their academic field?
- What ethical considerations and challenges are associated with determining first authorship in collaborative research projects?

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