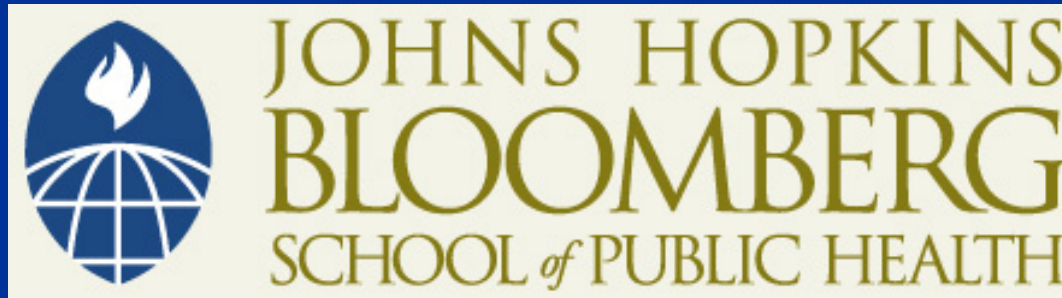


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# Writing Qualitative Research Papers

Qualitative Data Analysis 2008  
Class Session 9

# Introduction to Publishing

- Options for disseminating study results include journals, books, newsletters, conference presentations, and others.

# What is a Peer-Reviewed Journal?

- A journal that publishes papers only after they have been reviewed by (typically) 3 experts in the field.
- Reviews are either single or double blinded.
  - Single blinded means the reviewer knows who wrote the paper but the author of the paper doesn't know who the reviewers are.
  - Double blinded means neither the reviewers nor the authors know each other's identity.
- Reviewers recommend if the paper should be published and whether revisions are necessary before publication (revisions are commonly required).

# Example of Review Criteria: Social Science and Medicine

- Referees are asked to evaluate a manuscript for:
  - originality and significance of contribution
  - interest to social scientists and/or practitioners
  - international relevance
  - coverage of appropriate existing literature
  - adequacy of methodology, analysis and interpretation
  - clear, concise and jargon-free writing style
  - organisation

# Things to think about when choosing a journal

- What audience will your paper appeal to?
- What journals publish papers on topics similar to yours?
- What journal will provide a good opportunity to disseminate your study results to a wide audience?
- Is the journal indexed so that people will find your paper easily?
- What is the journal's "impact" score?

# Getting to Know the Journals

- Read widely on topics of interest to you. Where are the papers published?
- Visit websites of various journals to learn more.



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# Frequently Asked Questions

- Can I submit a paper to more than one journal at a time?
- Can I publish something after presenting it at a conference?
- Can I present something at a conference that I've already published?
- How do I prepare my paper for submission?
- What happens after I submit my paper?
- What happens after my paper has been accepted for publication?
- What happens if my paper is rejected?

# Getting it Done: Some General Tips

- Read a lot of papers! Good writers are avid readers.
- Don't wait until you have all of your thoughts clearly formulated before you start to write. Thinking and writing happen together. Your thoughts will become more developed and more clearly articulated as you write and re-write.
- Make a 2 to 3 hour writing session a regular part of your schedule (daily or weekly). The most productive writers are those who tackle writing projects in frequent short sessions rather than infrequent long sessions.
- Share your writing with others at regular intervals to get constructive criticism.

# Getting it Done: Tips con't

- Create a writing schedule with small, specific and measurable targets.
  - Example of an overly general and non-specific target:
    - July 15—complete the introduction of my paper
  - Example of a specific target:
    - July 15—spend 3 hours searching the PubMed database and compiling a list of literature for review and possible inclusion in my introduction.

# What characterizes successful writing?

- Good writing is clear and concise. Get to the point and avoid jargon.
- Limit the scope of your paper. Focus on a few key points and hammer them home.
- Organize your thoughts down to the last detail and keep everything focused around the key points of your paper.
- Your objective is to communicate to your reader (not to prove your expertise).
- Be honest.

# Writing the Introduction

# Objectives of the Introduction

- Define the problem, why is it important?
- Review what is currently known about the problem, include abundant references to published literature.
- Point out what information or knowledge is missing about the problem...where are the gaps?
- Indicate how your data can fill the gaps and make us more informed about the problem



# Define the Problem

- “Although smoking prevalence in Australia has fallen substantially across the population in the past three decades, the rates for women have declined less than those for men (refs).... Moreover, the prevalence of smoking among teenage girls (aged 12 to 17) is no longer declining (refs)....These figures represent a significant cost to women’s short- and longer term health” (Lennon 2005)

# What is already known?

- “Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have identified sociodemographic, environmental, behavioral, and personal factors associated with smoking (refs). Differences in correlates of smoking for young women from those for young men have also been found (refs). This is particularly the case for behavioral and personal factors such as stress (refs), self esteem and depression (refs), self-concept (refs), concerns about body weight or shape (refs), dieting behavior (refs), and social factors such as peer influence (refs).” Lennon 2005

# What information is missing?

- “Given the possibility that young women might derive such perceived benefits from choosing to smoke, there is a need to understand more fully why young women begin to smoke and why they continue. Previous studies have focused primarily on the initiation of smoking among adolescents, typically school children under the age of 16. However, very little is known about young adults or the identities associated with the maintenance or cessation of smoking.” (Lennon 2005)

# How can your data make us more informed?

- “We used a social identity perspective to explore personal and social factors that influence the likelihood of smoking among young women between the ages of 16 and 28 years.”

# Guidelines for Reviewing and Citing Literature

- Don't cite a reference unless you've read it.
- If you quote a reference, quote precisely, word-for-word, as in the original. Use quotation marks.
- Record complete bibliographic information for each reference source. You may want to learn how to use a software program such as EndNote to make this cataloguing process easier.

# Guidelines for Reviewing and Citing Literature

- Focus on the literature that relates to your paper topic most closely, is most significant, and is up-to-date.
- Make sure you include “landmark” studies.
- Take notes on the sources you read, summarize them for yourself and note the key points. This will help you build arguments for your introduction and conclusion.
- Include literature that represents conflicting sides of a contentious issue in order to be fair.

# Writing the Methods Section

# What are the basic components of most methods sections?

- Description of aims
- Description of how this fits within larger study
- Description of sites
- Sampling and recruitment
- Data collection (audiotaping, privacy, etc.)
- Topics/questions that were covered
- Data processing (transcribe, translate, etc.)
- Data analysis approach
- Statement about ethical review and informed consent.



# Description of Aims

- It often helps to start with a statement about the aims of the qualitative research
- Sometimes description of the aims comes in the introduction.
  - “The research objective was to explore in-depth information regarding the challenges facing widows in Kenya.”
  - “This paper examines the complexities surrounding the process of treatment seeking for acute febrile illness among children under the age of five in a peri-urban village in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.”
  - “To explore aspects of sexual dynamics occurring within adolescent relationships.”

# If the qualitative work is part of a larger study

- In some cases, qualitative research may be the study.
- In many cases, qualitative data was gathered in the context of a larger study.
- Describe how the qualitative research relates to the overall study.
  - “The qualitative research as conducted in parallel to a case-control study investigating factors associated with adolescent pregnancy.”
  - “The sub-population of current and former sex workers was selected from a cohort study of 500 FSW in Chiang Rai Province, northern Thailand....Using the cohort database, a matrix selection list was generated along three key variables...invitations were sent to those fitting the criteria.”
  - “Data for the larger ethnographic study were gathered using a combination of methods....This paper, however, draws primarily on: (a) participant observation data...(b) detailed ethnographic interviews. “

# Description of Sites

- Helpful to include information on the site(s) where data were collected.
- Think about site characteristics that are most relevant to the study aims.
- No need to describe all aspects of the site.
  - In a study among injecting drug users, it may be helpful for the reader to have some details on the sites where injection drug use occurs.
  - In a study on malaria in Tanzania it is helpful to have information on the health care options in the villages.

# Sampling strategies

- Even if you describe your sample in the Results section, you should describe your sampling strategy in the Methods section.
- There are different sampling approaches in qualitative research:
  - Purposive/Theoretical
  - Representative
  - Extreme case/typical case
  - Snowball

# Describe how sample was recruited

- The procedures that are used to recruit sample may influence the information that is obtained.
- Thus, most readers want to understand how the sample was recruited so they can think about how that may have influenced the findings.
  - “Informants were recruited and interviewed in the Midwife Obstetric Unit to which they had presented for antenatal care. Potential informants were approached in the waiting-room by the fieldworker, who explained that we wanted to interview teenagers about issues related to pregnancy and young people’s experiences of sexual relationships.”
  - “Recruitment of participants was attempted through various means. Youth workers were contacted about possible participants. Posters, flyers and promotional material were distributed to young women’s organizations and other youth friendly sites in urban and rural locations, and an advertisement was also placed in a popular music street-magazine.”

# Describe the data collection process

- Who conducted the interviews?
- In what language?
- Where were the interviews conducted?
- Were the interviews audiotaped?
- How long did they interviews last?

# Provide information on the questions that were asked

- Providing details on the interview questions can be very useful.
- Not necessary to provide the readers with the complete interview guide
- Focus on the questions that are related to the paper topic

# Describe how data was processed

- Transcription
  - Was it done? Who did it?
- Translation
  - Was it done? Who did it?
- Data entry
  - Was data computerized?



# Describe the data analysis process

- Some people name the process
  - Ethnography
  - Grounded Theory
  - Phenomenology
  - Narrative
  - Case Study
- Other people just describe the steps
  - Reading/reviewing data
  - Open coding/structured coding/focused coding
  - Displaying data
  - Data reduction
  - Interpretation

# Statement about ethical review and informed consent

- Often in the beginning or end of a methods section authors include a statement about the ethical clearance.
  - “The study protocol was approved by the institutional review boards at X and X.”
- Authors may also include a statement about informed consent:
  - “Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants prior to data collection.”

# Critiquing the Methods Sections from Two Papers

- Refer to the following two papers
  - Campbell, C.; Foulis, C.A.; Maimane, S.; Sibiya, Z. (2005) “I Have an Evil Child at My House” : Stigma and HIV/AIDS Management in a South African Community. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 95(5): 808-815.
  - Humbert, L.; Chad, K.; Spink, K.; Muhajarine, N.; Anderson, K.; Bruner, M.; Girolami, T.; Odnokon, P.; Gryba, C. (2006) Factors that Influence Physical Activity Participation Among High and Low-SES Youth. *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 16(4): 467-483.

# Writing the Results Section

# Describing the Sample

- Give the readers information on the sample so they can understand from where the data are coming.
- If you are drawing on multiple sources of data (in-depth interviews and FGD) then describe the samples separately.
- Typically a description of the sample is provided in the beginning of the Results section.

# Should you include a table with demographic data on the sample?

- This is a technique borrowed from quantitative papers
- It may make sense for qualitative datasets with relatively large sample sizes (i.e over 50, 100?)
- But for small datasets (under 30) may not make sense to use a table to describe the sample.
- What you may want to say about your sample, may not best be displayed in a tabular form. You may want to describe more than the socio-demographic profile.

# What do readers need to know about your sample?

- This depends on the focus of the paper.
- For example, for a paper describing the perceived barriers to HIV testing, you may want to describe the proportion of your sample that has already been tested for HIV
- For a paper on HIV related stigma, it may be important for readers to know what proportion of the people you spoke with are HIV-infected

# Review two examples from papers

- Kamat, Vinay K. 2006. “I thought it was only ordinary fever!” cultural knowledge and the micropolitics of therapy seeking for childhood febrile illness in Tanzania. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 62: 2945-2959.
- Wight, D.; Plummer, M.L.; Mshana, G.; Wamoyi, J.; Shigongo, Z.; Ross, D. 2006. Contradictory sexual norms and expectations for young people in rural Northern Tanzania. *Social Science and Medicine*, 62: 987-997.
- What do you like/not like about their description of the sample?



# Deciding how to present your findings....

- No rules on how to present qualitative findings.
- As with any paper, you want the reader to take away a few key messages from the paper.
- You need to think about how to organize the presentation of findings to help the reader get these take-away messages.
- The presentation of findings needs to link back to all other parts of the paper:
  - Introduction: Points out gaps that findings will fill
  - Methods: Reports only methods that were used to elicit these findings

# Different approaches to presenting the results:

- Present themes with supportive quotes
- Use a theoretical framework to organize the presentation of results
- Organize findings according to chronology—steps of a decision making process
- Organize findings according to sub-groups that were interviewed
- Use case studies to illustrate cross-cutting themes within a single case
- Use diagrams to display the relationships of certain themes

# To count or not to count when presenting qualitative findings?

- Everything we do involves some level of quantification
  - Identifying a salient themes/pattern involves seeing something over and over again
  - Anytime we take raw data and put it into categories and look for patterns it implies a numbered nature of these patterns.
- However, we need to be cautious about how we represent out quantification of qualitative findings.
- Some journals want to see numbers, tables and percentages when reporting qualitative findings.

# Counting qualitative data....

- Sometimes we can attach a label ( few, some, most) however these terms are ambiguous and open to wide interpretation.
  - Instead we could use numbers, “3 of the 12 informants said X”
  - Or we could define up front what the terms mean (i.e. common means mentioned by more than 50% of informants)
- A bigger problem arises when using percentages to describe small samples.
  - When people read percentages, they immediately infer the meaning of this for a larger population.
  - We often can't insure all informants were asked same question, thus we don't know our denominator.

# Using Illustrative Quotes

- In qualitative research, the text (words of our informants) is our data, and thus we usually end up presenting some direct quotations.
- The challenge is how to identify what are illustrative quotes to present and how to balance the presentation of quotes with some interpretation of findings.

# Avoid using too many quotes

- Often difficult to select one illustrative quote, so authors end up including too many quotes.
- There needs to be some synthesis/ interpretation of quotes in addition to the raw data.
- Readers lose sight of the main point, when there are too many quotes.

# How to choose an illustrative quote

- There are no rules about what makes a good quote to include in a paper.
- Often you have a selection of many quotes that represent a specific theme.
- Choose the quote that most concisely represents the theme or idea you are trying to express.
- Words or phrases that are memorable often make the best quotations.
- Don't choose quotations that are extreme outliers, unless this is the point you are trying to make in the paper.

# How to label quotes in papers

- Typically you include a few identifiers on the informant parenthetically after a quotation
  - *(single, female, 32 years)*
- What you include in terms of identifiers depends on the focus of the study.
  - Gender, age, couple status.
  - Tester/non-tester
  - HIV-positive/HIV-negative



# Two approaches to including quotations

- Wood, K.; Maforah, F.; Jewkes, R. 1998. “He forced me to love him” Putting Violence on Adolescent Sexual Health Agendas. *Social Science and Medicine*, 47(2): 233-242.
- Davey, S.J.; Dziurawiec, S.; O’Brien-Malone, A. 2006. Men’s voices: Postnatal Depression from the Perspective of Male Partners. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(2): 206-220.
- Refer to the results section.
- Note how they use quotations.
- Compare and contrast their use of quotations.

# Presenting case studies

- Sometimes people use case studies that represent multiple themes rather than identifying multiple themes and multiple quotations that illustrate those themes.
- Some people feel that you get a more holistic picture with the presentation of a complete case study.
- It often depends what you want to communicate.
- If you are describing a behavioral process (i.e. treatment seeking) it may be very useful to describe one illustrative case of a person seeking care from multiple sources.

# Example of presentation of case studies

- Kamat, Vinay K. 2006. “I thought it was only ordinary fever!” cultural knowledge and the micropolitics of therapy seeking for childhood febrile illness in Tanzania. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 62: 2945-2959.
- Did you like the way that Kamat and colleagues used case studies in their results section?
- Did the case studies allow for presentation of results in a way that could not have been done through other methods?

# Organizing the findings through theoretical frameworks

- Sometimes the data were collected to explore specific theoretical associations, thus it may make sense to present findings using the theoretical framework.
- Other times, a specific theory emerges while analyzing the data and it makes sense to present the findings according to the theoretical framework.

# Example of presenting findings according to a theoretical framework

- Humbert, L.; Chad, K.; Spink, K.; Muhajarine, N.; Anderson, K.; Bruner, M.; Girolami, T.; Odnokon, P.; Gryba, C. 2006. Factors that Influence Physical Activity Participation Among High and Low-SES Youth. *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 16(4): 467-483.
- Mosack, K.E.; Abbott, M.; Singer, M.; Weeks, M.; Rohena, L. 2005. If I didn't have HIV, I'd be Dead Now: Illness narratives of drug users with HIV/AIDS. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(5): 586-605.

# Using visual techniques like diagrams to present qualitative findings

- Sometimes it is easier to describe associations between variables visually than it is through words.
- Visual diagrams of associations can be a powerful way to reduce data and communicate findings.
- Look at the following papers and discuss the use of diagrams:
  - Turnbull, B. et al. The Social Construction of Anemia in School Shelters for Indigenous Children in Mexico.
  - Weaver, K. et al., Understanding women's journey of recovering from anorexia nervosa.

# Making your case: the discussion section

# The Discussion Section

- The discussion section *argues* a point in the context of other published literature.
- “What are the implications of my study?”
  - For past and future research?
  - For our own intervention? For other interventions?
- “What are the limitations of my study?”
  - What the results *cannot* say



# Discussion Sections

- Introduction
- Critical engagement with literature (and sometimes theory)—what gaps does this fill?
- Implications for intervention, policy, & research
- Limitations
- Conclusion of paper

# Introducing the Discussion

- Discussion section *argues* a point or points; introduction must set up your argument
- Suggests the unique contribution of your work—how this paper fills the gaps
- Can offer the theoretical framework through which results are interpreted
- Present and discuss the paper's *3-4 key points*, in the context of larger issues.

# Critical engagement: other literature

- The purpose of writing a paper is to make a unique contribution to our knowledge of a certain topic (e.g. stigma, risk)
- This has been set up in the introduction to the paper, and structured your presentation of the results
- In the Discussion section, you present how your results support or disagree with the findings of other studies
- *Move from what you found, to what others have found, or vice versa.*

# Critical engagement: supporting arguments

- Wight et al. (2006), p. 995
  - “Young people manage the contradictory norms and expectations primarily by concealing their sexual relationships... . Secrecy in sexual culture has been noted elsewhere in East Africa (Nzioka, 2001; Setel, 1999).”
- Humbert et al. (2006), p. 478
  - “To our knowledge, the difference between high and low SES youth regarding the importance of several environmental factors has not been reported in previous qualitative research. However, our findings are supported by previous quantitative studies that indicate physical activity among young people is positively correlated with having access to convenient play spaces (Zakarian et al., 1994), sports equipment (Stucky-Ropp & DiLorenzo, 1993), and transportation to sports or fitness programs (Sallis, Prochaska, et al., 2000).

# Critical engagement: disagreement

- Kamat (2006), p. 2956
  - “Critics have pointed out that the privatization of health care, characterized most evidently by user fees, has a devastating effect on the health of the poor, and the sick, especially women and young children (cf. Mwabu, 2001; Mwabu, Mwanzia, & Liambia, 1995; Turshen, 1999). In the context of a peri-urban village in Dar es Salaam, however, this case study suggest that while most children with a febrile illness are brought to a biomedical health facility 48 h after the onset of fever, this delay is not primarily due to the user fees charged at public health facilities.”

# Critical engagement: theory

- Did a specific theoretical perspective shape your interpretation of results?
- Generally mentioned in introduction & results
- In Discussion, weave this together with your presentation of evidence into a coherent and specific argument:
  - “Using Frank’s (1995, 1998) Illness Narrative framework as a starting point to categorize narrative types, we constructed the model presented here, which explained more completely our participants’ experiences of living with HIV or AIDS” (Mosack et al., 2005)

# Implications

- May sometimes appear as a separate section, depending on the journal, and the author's purpose
- Generally three types of implications:
  - Research: past, future
  - Interventions
    - Ours
    - Other potential interventions
  - Public policy recommendations
- Be specific. “Our findings have implications for....”  
What are they?

# Implications: research & policy

- Humbert et al. (2006)
  - “The results of this study suggest that researchers, as well as health care professionals and educators, consider the factors that influence physical activity level.”



# Implications: intervention

- Luginaah et al. (2005)
  - “Considering that most of these widows may have been HIV-positive, communities and families must be made to understand that compulsory remarriage of widows because custom requires, is dangerous to them, their new sexual partners and their future generations.”

# Implications for research, policy, and intervention

- Weaver et al. (2005)
  - “The finding that both perilous self-soothing and informed self-care arise from women’s interactions within social structure and not as individual intrapsychic processes underscores the inappropriateness of relying on personality characteristics, discrete behavioral responses, and single events to evaluate AN and its recovery, as these factors and their impact are understandable only when context is taken into account. This suggests that improving general social conditions for women might not only aid their recovering, but might also prevent them from developing AN in the first place.”

# Specific implications: Wood

- “In particular, comprehensive and innovative intervention programmes need to be informed by localised research into: how constructions of gendered difference are formed, operationalised and enacted; the range of and motivation for adolescent sexual experience; how adolescents negotiate access to their bodies, including practices of violence; the different social contexts in which adolescents act; and the social spaces where communication about sexuality is practiced.” p.240

# Specific implications: Wood

- “In addition, sexuality research needs to address men as a priority. In the African context this area has been substantially ignored (especially qualitatively), excepting a short paper by Shire (1994)...” p.240
- “The data here indicates the need to challenge male control of sexual knowledge and female access to it, by enabling adolescents to create and be aware of alternative constructions of love and sexual practice. Part of the responsibility of school curriculae must be to empower young women with sexual information in order to demystify sexual intercourse . . . . Schools must take a lead in educating adolescents of both genders about sexual health and the non-acceptability of violence.” p.240

# Limitations

- What your study cannot say; the limits of how far your findings can be generalized
- Every study has limitations
  - Study design—methods, sampling
  - Type of data
  - Theoretical framework
- Frame your discussion of limitations in a way that complements your results.
  - “Despite these limitations....”

# Limitations of method

- One of the major critiques of qualitative research is the limited generalizability of findings.
- To address this problem head-on, many authors include a statement about the generalizability of findings either in the methods section or in the discussion section.
  - “This convenience sampling method is usual practice in qualitative research because the findings are inherently not generalizable and repeatable. WE believe that the informants were representative, in the colloquial sense of the word, of other pregnant teenagers using antenatal care in Khayelitsha, but they were not representative in the statistical sense.”
  - “A sample size of 45 subjects is not large enough to make definitive generalizations that go beyond the research site.”
- Journals that publish only (or mostly) qualitative research may not require a statement about generalizability, because this is general knowledge among most readers.

# Discussing Limitations

- Mosack (2005)
- Methods: “Participants in our study responded to questions about their experiences of living with HIV in a single interview. The retrospective accounts might certainly have been dependent on the peculiarities that these individuals were experiencing at that particular moment (Ezzy, 2000).”

# Limitations of Theory

- Mosack (2005)
- “Although we are not assigning value to particular stories, the very task of identifying predominant narratives and categorizing them is inherently culturally bound (Ezzy, 1998). We might have conceptualized differently because of our particular backgrounds and experiences (Miczo, 2003).”



# Addressing limitations effectively

- “While economic considerations are certainly important in treatment decision-making, they are mediated by several other crucial factors: cultural knowledge, past experience with the illness, the medications offered at government health facilities, and the micropolitics of communication about illness diagnosis and therapy management at government health facilities. The extent to which trends revealed by this single-village case study can be extrapolated to other geographical areas and social contexts is a methodological and an ethnographic question that needs to be addressed through further comparative research.” Kamat (2006): 2956.

# Concluding the paper

- Paragraph(s) (no more than 2) that pull the whole paper together
- May form a separate section
- Hit your main points again
  - Argument, and what's unique about it
  - How your results contributed to this
  - Contributions to lit & implications
- NEVER begin it with “In conclusion, ....” or “In summary,....”

# Concluding paragraph

- “Our case study highlights the gap between rhetoric and reality in terms of the way in which people often seek to give the impression that they or other family members are sexually inactive or HIV/AIDS free when, behind this curtain of social desirability, the truth might be very different. It also highlights the way in which the conventions of what constitutes social desirability may often both feed on and perpetuate unequal power relations between young and old, men and women, Black and White, and rich and poor. Community participation has a key role to play in promoting forms of critical consciousness that both expose and challenge the unequal social relations drawn on and sustained by stigma. As such, it should stand alongside education and legislation as a powerful weapon against stigma.”  
Campbell et al. (2005): 814.

# Authorship

# Authorship

- In order to be an author you should have *substantially* contributed in one of the following ways:
  - conception and design of the project on which the publication is based; or
  - analysis *and* interpretation of data; and
  - drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
  - final approval of the version to be published.

# Order of authors on a paper

- Different levels of contribution: The person who has made the greatest contribution to the paper is to be listed first with remaining authors listed in order of their contribution.
- The most senior co-worker who has the ultimate responsibility for the project, but who must also fulfill the above-mentioned criteria for authorship, is usually listed last [Principle Investigator (PI) and/or PD]
- The last author could also be a member of the team who guides and oversees the framework of the paper (In our case, this be one of our Co-Investigators or a senior HSRC researcher who has assisted junior teams through the various stages of writing a publication).