Editorial

H. J. Caulfield, Editor *Optical Engineering*

An Open Letter to Referees

Authors are the most important contributors to the quality of a technical journal, but referees are not far behind. Unfortunately, the delicate nature of their job prevents me from giving them public thanks by name for the work they do. I do appreciate their hard work and I love to see them mentioned in the acknowledgments of revised papers. To all of you who have helped by refereeing—thank you.

Having praised our referees, I hope I offend none of them by making suggestions on how to make their reviews more helpful to me. The list of suggestions which follows is in no particular order nor is it complete. It is, instead, a litany of editorial problems, peeves, and prejudices.

- (1) Tell me (using the card enclosed with the manuscript) if you can do the review promptly. If you cannot, try to help me by suggesting a colleague qualified to review the paper.
- (2) If I am to reject a paper, I need a reason more substantial than "Boring," "Old Hat," "Wrong." Those are actual comments from reviewers. The reviewers may well be correct, but I cannot forward such noninformative comments to the authors. I need reasons as to why the manuscript is wrong, what makes it old hat, and what sections were too wordy or clumsy. Like the rest of us, authors need help. Most of my reviewers have been helped by referees on several occasions. Now is the time to return the favor. Give the authors (and me) meaningful comments.
- (3) Tell me about missing references even if you can do no better than, "I think Smith published something like this in about 1970." Science is the work of people. They deserve public credit for their accomplishments.
- (4) Please make positive suggestions on style and content. All authors whose referees suggest changes are given the opportunity to make those changes. I try in my letters to those authors to distinguish between optional and mandatory changes. Your help in that regard would be valuable.
- (5) Do not feel compelled to find fault or error. We are seeking high-quality, original, useful papers. Do not be surprised if you get one of these to review. A positive comment is welcomed by the authors (who enjoy the praise as much as anyone else) and by the editor (who gets the nice, warm feeling that you really did read the manuscript).
- (6) Be prompt! Remember your annoyance with manuscripts that took months to review.

All of these suggestions fall under two main rules. First, be professional. Offer good, useful, and informed comments. Second, be considerate. Offer comments on the work, not on the author. Help when you can.

In my first years as editor, I have received a very high fraction of high-quality reviews. Being an optimist, I am hoping for an even higher fraction in the future. I hope these comments promote the fine art of refereeing. Your comments would be welcome.

OPTICAL ENGINEERING EDITORIAL SCHEDULE

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David L. Coffeen, Guest Editor
National Aeronautics and Space Admin.
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Atmospheric Optical Communication

Cardinal Warde, Guest Editor
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Dept. of Elec. Engineering & Computer Sci.
Room 13-3134
Cambridge, MA 02139
617/253-6858

MARCH/APRIL 1981

Opto-Mechanical Design

Paul R. Yoder, Jr., Guest Editor
The Perkin-Elmer Corporation
Norwalk, CT 06856
203/762-1000

MAY/JUNE 1981

Optical Data Recording

A. Jamberdino, Guest Editor
Rome Air Development Center
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Rome, NY 13441
315/330-4581

Phase-Conjugate Optics

David Pepper, Guest Editor
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JULY/AUGUST 1981

Application of Optics to Energy Processes

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Aerodyne Research, Inc.
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617/275-9400

Kent Casleton, Guest Editor
Morgantown Energy Technology Center
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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1981

Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineering

Special papers to be invited by an editorial board of distinguished optical engineers, in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers and the 20th Anniversary of *Optical Engineering*.