Editorial

Jack D. Gaskill, Editor

"What Happened to My Paper?" Part II

Because sequels seem to be very popular in the movie-making business, I decided to write a sequel to an editorial that appeared in the July 1988 issue of this journal. That editorial presented some statistics related to the length of time it takes for papers to be published in *Optical Engineering*. As you may recall if you read it, slightly more than half of the total time required for publication is taken up by the review phase, and the excessive length of the review phase is often caused by delinquent referees. In the present editorial I give some hints for authors that may help reduce the delinquent referee problem.

Most individuals who are asked to serve as referees are extremely busy people. Very seldom are they able to do their reviews overnight, over the weekend, or even by the end of the following week. To illustrate, whenever I am asked to be a referee, I try to set aside a time during an evening or a weekend when I can sit down and give the manuscript my undivided attention—without interruptions or distractions. It might take two weeks or six weeks before I can actually

schedule the time to conduct my review, but when this time arrives I try to devote myself fully to the review process.

I usually start out by reading the abstract, an introductory paragraph or two, and the conclusions. I also scan the list of references and figures to help me establish the proper frame of mind before I really get into the meat of the paper. It is at this point that the length of time I will take to finish my review is determined. If the paper is well written, easy to read, interesting, has technical merit, etc., I simply press on. If, on the other hand, I get turned off by poor organization, bad grammar, crummy figures, single spacing, lack of substance, etc., I find it much more difficult to continue. As a result, I may subconsciously—or even consciously—start looking for other things to do so that I won't have to continue what has by then become an unpleasant duty. I might turn on the radio and listen to a presidential campaign speech, or turn on the TV and watch a chess match. Or, if the paper is really bad, I might even find an excuse to go outside and mow the grass; this would be extraordinary, not only because I hate to mow grass but also because Sandi and I don't have any grass to mow. Another outcome is the possibility that I might develop such a negative feeling about the paper that it would be difficult for me to see any of its positive aspects.

In a nutshell, I am trying to say that an author can help shorten the review time by submitting a manuscript that referees will have trouble putting down before they finish reading it. Don't help them procrastinate by submitting a piece of literary garbage that has neither stylistic appeal nor technical substance. Keep in mind a modified version of the golden rule: write for others as you would have them write for you.

Good luck, and many happy reviews!

OPTICAL ENGINEERING EDITORIAL SCHEDULE

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