

## How to Have Your Paper Returned

**P**ERIODICALLY I find myself in conversations with authors revolving around the length of time it takes to have a paper published. There is no question that it would be desirable to reduce the average length of time it takes to process a paper. Authors normally accuse the Editors of being tardy. We, the Editors, being more even-minded, tend to pass the burden to the Reviewers and Authors. In fact, there are things that all three parties to the decision process can do to help. A year ago, in this Editorial, I explained what reviewers can do to provide the type of information upon which we really would like to base our decisions. It would make my writing that Editorial worthwhile if only a few of you went back and read it before preparing your next review. As for what authors can do, perhaps the following letter might shed some light on the issue.

Dear Mom,

You have been such a supporter of my 30-year career here at the Acme Avionics and Screen Door Company that I thought you deserved an explanation of why I have never had a paper published the first time I submit it. Let me tell you about a letter I recently received from the Editor of the *Journal of Guidance, Control, and Dynamics*. You understand how important my work is to both Acme and to the world. Obviously, he has no appreciation for this or he wouldn't be so insistent on condensing my vast contributions to a mere 36 units. The Editor had the nerve to return the first version I wrote unreviewed merely because I had taken 64 pages to fully develop my ideas so others could follow. Recalling how you had raised me never to be combative, I held my temper and returned a version where I cleverly was able to meet his ridiculously small 36-unit requirement. Would you believe that he returned it to me again suggesting that I had been unresponsive? Mom, how could he say this? I carefully stacked the figures over a single abscissa so that I would have fewer figures in the paper. He claimed that it would take almost the same vertical space in the Journal and that I had made the legends impossible to read (perhaps he ought to get new glasses). Additionally, I helped him out by having my word processor print my paper in a smaller type size. Would you believe, in this modern age, he insists that the Journal is printed with a single type size and my changing the print size would not help at all. Finally, I argued that, since I had already presented the paper as a preprint at an AIAA meeting and it occupied only 16 pages, how could he possibly argue that the paper was over 36 units in length? His answer seems to revolve around some obscure guideline which equates the text in an AIAA preprint page to approximately four units as I submitted it to the Journal.

Not only is this Editor unreasonable about space but he is interfering with my advancement at Acme. I put Acme's name on all of the figures so we could advertise in the Journal and cleverly showed how Acme screens and avionics are better than anyone else's. Our Marketing Vice President loved it and promised me a bonus for this year. My sponsor at the National Screen Door Foundation promised an additional grant next year because I made him look good to his boss by including material on all the programs he is sponsoring. The editor forced me to delete all this! Worse yet, he further damaged my reputation by not letting me stake claim to ideas by promising future work in the Conclusions Section.

The final insult in my correspondence with the Editor of this Journal is that he is actually trying to tell me how to write the paper. He insisted the Conclusions Section stand alone without either references or my strategic referrals back to the main body of the text for more details. As if this were not bad enough, he apparently did not appreciate the sophisticated equations and the erudite symbols I used in the Conclusions Section. In fact, he made me rewrite the whole Conclusions Section to eliminate all of this material.

Remember how I explained to you how I am so well known in my specialized field of electronic screens that I receive letters from all over the world? In my papers, I share these thoughts from others by referencing these letters as "private communications." These same people send me accompanying reports and articles published in the seven foreign languages that I speak. Naturally, when the Editor told me that I could not submit a 64-unit paper, I referenced much of this material. Would you believe he turned right around and said that private communications and "obscure" references were not permitted? I tried to save space by using all of the acronyms my buddies here at Acme always use. The @&%!&%# Editor said I had 'grossly overused acronyms' and he made me take most of them out. In fact, he made me take *all* of them out of the title, the Abstract, and the Conclusions Section. As if that weren't bad enough, he seemed to think that 12 words would be more than enough to adequately describe my paper in the title. I must concede he seems to know how to count if he knows nothing else. I did use 18 words. But really, Mom, he also said the 18 words didn't even describe what the paper was all about—what an insult!

Well, now I suppose you can see why my career seems to be advancing so slowly. It is a real trial and tribulation dealing with the likes of the Editorial Team of the *Journal of Guidance, Control, and Dynamics*. I think there must be some conspiracy. They act as if they have talked to their counterparts in places like the IEEE, ASME, and the AAS. I'll fix them, though. If they don't appreciate my work, my next paper is going to the Screen Door Society.

Love,

Your son

If you spot any of the sins the loving child above complained about in that paper you are about to submit, consider eliminating them before you submit it. Perhaps you could join the ranks of some of those rare authors whose papers have been accepted without revision. If you do, you will have eliminated what is frequently the largest delay in the publication process: the revision. In case any of you think these are not frequent sins, you should know that I found every one of them in just one morning's worth of submittal mail.

Let me close by once again thanking our reviewers. Without them, the whole concept of an archival journal would be impossible. The list of those who have helped us this year follows.

Donald C. Fraser  
Editor-in-Chief