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The EUCheM Soc Societies have taken the significant step into the future by merging their traditional journals, to form two leading chemistry journals, the *European Journal of Inorganic Chemistry* and the *European Journal of Organic Chemistry*. Three further EUCheM Soc Societies (Austria, Czech Republic and Sweden) are Associates of the two journals.

## Editorial

### Statistically Speaking

Sometimes when I am part of a discussion about publication times a Till Eulenspiegel anecdote comes to my mind. One day as Eulenspiegel was walking from one town to another, a coach stopped next to him. The coachman who was in a hurry asked Eulenspiegel how far away the next town was. He replied: "Sir, you may reach the town gate in half an hour if you drive unhurriedly. If you drive fast, I presume it will take you several hours." The coachman stared at him in disbelief. Then, more angrily, he called him a silly fool while he whipped his horses, and soon the coach was out of sight. Not caring, Eulenspiegel went on. In a leisurely pace he walked along the road that happened to be full of potholes. After one hour, he went past a coach that had fallen into the ditch. It was the same coach, but the front axle was broken. The coachman was cursing and yelling, trying to repair the damage. In passing Eulenspiegel said to him: "Remember what I told you? Half an hour if you do not hurry."

Eulenspiegel was a medieval trickster who stemmed from Lower Saxony and travelled Europe, fooling and playing jokes on people, and, in particular, the authorities. It is not certain whether he is a historical person. He might have been a man of lower nobility but often is portrayed as a jester, particularly in children's books. Also, he is immortalized in the symphonic poem *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* by Richard Strauss.

Whenever I am asked about the publication times of EurJOC, I know that I am expected to give just one number – an average value – and not to discuss details such as statistical spread. A short response would be: 91 days median time from submission to web publication (EarlyView) for all EurJOC articles – Full Papers, Short Communications, and Microreviews – published in 2007. Generally, Short Communications are published about one month faster than Full Papers, but I should point out that a small number of EurJOC Short Communications had previously been submitted to *Angewandte Chemie* and were, on the grounds of the referee recommendations and by agreement of the authors, transferred to EurJOC. Inclusion of these papers would slightly distort the publication time statistics because for them the time from submission of the original manuscript to submission of the revised manuscript is missing. Nonetheless, a journal that claims to be the "fastest general organic and bioorganic journal" has repeatedly published publication time statistics that include papers that were published in that journal but were initially assessed for publication in another journal. This practice, however, makes their publication times incommensurable to those of other journals or publishers.

But we, too, can play games with statistics. Do you want to see a trend? There you go: Actually, our publication times were decreasing in 2007:

**Decreasing  
Publication  
Times**

In the first three quarters (the figure for the last quarter is not yet available at the time of writing this editorial) median publication times were 96, 94, and 92 days for Full Papers and 63, 59, and 52 for Short Communications. Hence, in less than ten years our publication times will reach zero – but not asymptotically! Ridiculous, isn't it? But then again, not more ridiculous than other abuses of statistics. But seriously – I would say our current publication times are fine even if there is still some room for improvement. We do strive for fast publication but not for unreasonably fast publication. Otherwise at some stage it would become inevitable to compromise on quality for the sake of speed – be it at the reviewing or editing stage.

Let's have a closer look at the whole process: Since manuscripts submitted to EurJOC are handled in-house and do not have to be assigned to an external associate editor they are in general sent to the reviewers within one working day. For the review of a Short Communication or a Full Paper we grant our referees 14 days, which appears to be reasonable as this period corresponds to the *average* referee report turnaround time. If we want to maintain our standards and make decisions based on competently written reports, I feel we should not put more pressure upon our reviewers by asking them to send their reports faster. Sometimes, however, reviewers have to decline (or, regrettably, do not respond at all to our refereeing request), so that the manuscript must be sent to a replacement referee. Also, occasionally the opinion of a third (top) referee has to be solicited. As a result the *average* time from submission to initial decision is 21 days for accepted papers.

But as I wrote in an earlier editorial, what do all these average figures mean to you anyway when you submit your own manuscript? If referees recommend acceptance of a paper subject to major revision only, it will take an author perhaps one month to perform additional experiments and to send back the revised paper, but in some cases considerably longer. Should we put authors under pressure so as not to deteriorate our publication times? Or renounce the major alterations suggested by the referees? If so, the logical next step would be to renounce sending papers to reviewers in the first place. But: Mind the potholes.

## Careful Language Editing

The *average* publication time of roughly three months includes thorough editing and language polishing. The latter, in particular, was required by the chemical societies that co-own EurJOC when its predecessor journals were merged. Not one of the countries involved has English as their home language. To give you an example, less than 60 % of the papers published in *Organic Biomolecular Chemistry* (RSC) and *Journal of Organic Chemistry* (ACS) in 2004 and 2005 but 90 % of the papers published in EurJOC in the same period were from non-English

speaking countries. This is another fact that is gladly ignored by other journals when they present their statistics. Careful language editing can be time-consuming and hence impinges negatively on our average publication times. Even so, it adds value to a manuscript for the benefit of both authors and readers, and from the feedback we receive, we know that it is worth the effort since our authors with a mother tongue other than English appreciate it.

There is yet another aspect to consider when you compare publication times as times from submission to (initial) web publication. As is common for a chemistry journal published by Wiley-VCH, EurJOC papers published online ahead of print (EarlyView) are available as PDF files. Other than not having final page numbers, the articles look exactly like the articles as they appear in the printed issues. *Organic Biomolecular Chemistry* Advance Articles, in contrast, are available in HTML format only. An author may be happy that his paper was published as quickly as possible as he can now sit back and relax; the readers, on the other hand, are served better by downloadable PDF files. The *Beilstein Journal of Organic Chemistry* provides a so-called provisional PDF immediately upon acceptance of an article prior to fully formatted PDF and HTML, i.e., prior to revision by the author and copy editing. Again, the author may be satisfied, but what is the advantage for the readers who have to deal with two different published versions of a paper and do not know whether the data published in the first version are subject to change one month later? Thus, a comparison of the publication times of these journals appears to be a bit like comparing apples and oranges.

On another note, I am grateful to the more than 1300 dedicated referees who helped in mending potholes and in paving the way to each new issue of EurJOC in 2007. When

1300  
Referees in  
2007

we ask reviewers to evaluate a paper we inform them that “we do not want to publish peripheral contributions, such as simply more examples of well-explored chemistry, or non-essential variations on a research theme.” Their “recommendation to us should be based on both the significance of the results and the solidity of the experimental foundation.” In addition, a Short Communication “is a brief report on results of high significance and urgency.” Thus, we ask referees explicitly to indicate whether they agree that the paper should be a Short Communication. A theoretical paper, in particular, must address a question of interest today to a broad audience of organic chemists. Thus, for publication in EurJOC the study must not only be technically sound but must also make a significant contribution to solving a topical problem in organic chemistry.

Finally, referees are requested to indicate the suitability of a submitted paper “by indicating the likely significance on the scale: very important, important, less important, minor

(unimportant).” In contrast, we do not ask referees to comment on the quality of the language because EurJOC offers a professional language-editing service. Therefore, as a referee for us you do not have to care about unidiomatic English or send us a list of all typographic errors that you have discovered unless you wish to point out an ambiguity. Whilst the importance criteria are to a certain extent subjective, they should, at any rate, be consistent with the recommendation to accept or reject a paper. Occasionally a referee suggests accepting a manuscript (after minor or major alterations) despite his/her judgment of the work as “less important”. As mentioned above, however, we do not wish to publish routine work. Thus, the editor counts classification of a paper as “less important” as a negative vote. Still, such a paper could be publishable in another, perhaps more specialized, journal. The typical EurJOC paper would be considered “important”; a very important paper could be one that deserves to be featured on the cover picture or to be highlighted in the “Spotlights on Our Sister Journals” (see p. 14–15). In contrast, the attribute “minor” should be assigned only to papers that are possibly not publishable at all.

### Most Cited Articles on the Web

25/2007 – the special celebratory issue – contained a table summarizing EurJOC’s top three most cited articles of the years 1998 to 2006. The journal’s homepage ([www.eurjoc.org](http://www.eurjoc.org)) now offers a new feature: “Most Cited” complements “Most Accessed” and currently covers articles published in 2004 and 2005.



Haymo Ross at the ACS Fall Meeting 2007 in Boston at the Wiley Booth during the reception on the occasion of EurJOC’s and EurJIC’s 10th anniversary.

You may have noticed that this is the time frame on which the 2006 Impact Factor is based. I have always wondered why people are inclined to judge journals solely by this figure. Would you judge a car just by the horsepower of its engine? Fair enough, some people do. There are, of course,

more figures to characterize a car, such as gas consumption, trunk size, number of seats, you name it. Other characteristics such as safety, comfort, crumple zone etc. cannot be expressed by figures. I understand that librarians need easy tools for their decision-making, but why is it that so many scientists do not look at scientific journals in the same way rather than by reducing them to an only partially meaningful number? Newspapers, for instance, do not have an Impact Factor. Sure enough, they are also distinguished by numbers like print run or market share but these are probably not arguments you would bring forward if you were to justify why you prefer your favourite newspaper(s) to others. In the end, isn’t it content and quality that count?

According to Thomson Scientific’s Journal Citation Reports, the 2006 Impact Factors of *Euro-pean Journal of Organic Chemistry* (2.769), *Tetrahedron* (2.817), *Synlett* (2.838), and *Organic & Biomolecular Chemistry* (OBC; 2.874), all of which are listed in the subject category “Chemistry, Organic”, are practically the same. Does this imply that these four journals are all the same? No, there are many differences depending on the point of view. From a publisher’s perspective one could categorize OBC and EurJOC as society-owned journals and *Synlett* and *Tetrahedron* as journals from commercial publishers. They are also distinguishable by their scope or by their article types, e.g., *Synlett* predominantly publishes Letters (short articles) devoted to synthetic organic chemistry, whereas the other three cover a wider range of organic chemistry topics with a focus on Full Papers. All four journals publish review-type articles, some occasionally and some on a regular basis. But even if you take only the Impact Factor into account, the journals differ on closer inspection. The Impact Factor is an average value and – as with all average values – does not provide any information about the distribution of citations. For instance, 7 % of all citations relevant to the 2006 Impact Factor of OBC come from only three articles – or less than 0.3 % of all articles. By comparison: The top three articles published in EurJOC, *Synlett*, and *Tetrahedron* in the same period contributed 3, 3, and 2 %. As far as the ranking is concerned, it is easy to see that even a single highly cited article makes a difference. So why all this fuss about the Impact Factor?

On average, we published 1.7 articles per day in 2007, and each EurJOC issue contained about 170 pages. I wish you a Happy New Year 2008 (which happens to be a leap year and is, therefore, longer than average)!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Haymo Ross".

Haymo Ross, Editor

**Impact Factor:**  
**2.769**