

Editorial

“Après un long silence, dont je ne chercherai pas à m’excuser, j’ai le plaisir de vous communiquer, Monsieur, et par votre moyen à la Société Royale, quelques résultats frappants auxquels je suis arrivé, en poursuivant mes expériences sur l’électricité [sic] par le simple contact mutuel des métaux de différente espèce, et même par celui des autres conducteurs, aussi différents entr’eux...”. With these words began 200 years ago Alessandro Volta a letter to Sir Joseph Banks, the Chairman of the Royal Society. In this ‘letter’, which was, in fact, quite long and detailed, Volta described the preparation and properties of his pile. His work, and that of Galvani (in never-ending polemics), marks the beginning of electrophysiology – of electrochemistry and of a number of electricity-based sciences.¹

This is occasion enough for our journal – where we also published papers on ion channels, on electrogenic ion-associated membrane transport, etc., – to pay tribute to this truly seminal discovery.

Interestingly – human nature does not change – Volta chose the form of a letter to the Royal Society, rather than that of the more common, but far slower publication of a book (we would say, of a ‘full-length’ report), because he feared competition, as he will mention later elsewhere. Just too bad that our own journal came a mere 170 years too late to publish Volta’s discovery! Certainly we would have been far faster than the Royal Society (see Fig. 2 below).

As in the past years, I take the opportunity of the special

issue to convey some information on the state of our journal. As far as I see, it keeps thriving – which is due, first of all, to the quality of papers which you, dear reader and author, send to us. Fig. 1 shows the development of our impact factor, which, if corrected for the length of papers, is similar to that of the Journal of Biological Chemistry. So is the citation half-life (5.2 years).

Another criterion of the attractiveness of our journal is the fact that we receive more and more manuscripts every year: for example, in 1998 we received some 250 mss more than in the previous year, i.e. 3391. Although our rejection rate has increased (and, unfortunately, it will have to do so even more in the future), the size of our journal has grown again over that of the previous year, and we gave some 1000 pages at no extra cost to the subscribers.

Undoubtedly, the major single factor for the attractiveness of the journal is its speed of publication, which is now **6.8 weeks**, or **34 working days** (Fig. 2).

This does NOT mean that our reviewing process need be faster than that of our journals: in particular, **rejecting** a paper is fairly time-consuming, involving, as it does, at least two or three reviewers and two Editors. Hence: do not send us a paper ‘for a try’: this means a net loss of time for both you and us. And – whether in Europe or in the USA – time is a rare commodity which is cherished by everyone!

Zurich, May 1999

G. Semenza

Impact Factor of FEBS Letters
(Rolling Average)

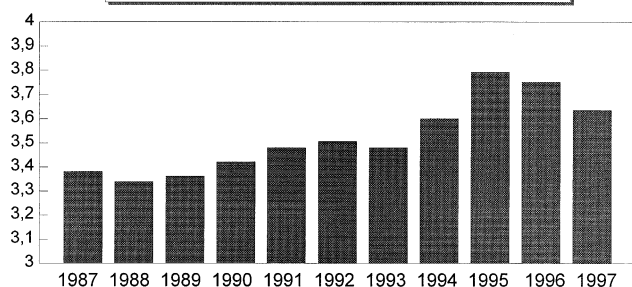


Fig. 1. Development Impact Factor FEBS Letters: rolling average 1987 to 1997.

Overall Handling Time
Dispatch minus Rec./Rev. Date

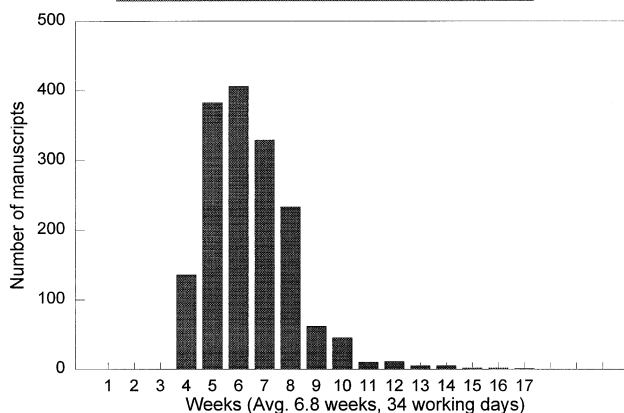


Fig. 2. Overall publication time of all communications published in 1998 (volumes 421–441): date of dispatch from warehouse minus date of receipt of revised manuscript or first editor’s date of receipt when no revision was involved. Average publication time: 34.0 working days; 6.8 weeks.

¹ Volta’s letter appeared in 1800 (‘On the electricity, excited by the mere contact of conducting substances of different kinds’). I want to thank the Istituto Lombardo, Accademia di Scienze e Lettere, Milan and Dr. Bianchi, in particular, for having provided me with this and with more information. Volta had been the Institute’s first President, whose complete collection of writings is the core of the Institute’s library. I want to thank also Prof. S. Morgana.

Table 1
Geographical distribution FEBS Letters Vols. 421–441 (1998)

Country	Origin of papers		Journal distribution	
	No.	%	No. ^a	%
Austria	14	0.8	11	0.8
Belgium	31	1.9	11	0.8
Byelorussia	1	0.1		
Croatia	1	0.1	1	0.1
Czech Republic	4	0.2	2	0.1
Denmark	25	1.5	10	0.7
Estonia	2	0.1	1	0.1
Finland	14	0.8	8	0.6
France	114	6.9	70	4.9
Germany	205	12.4	124	8.6
Greece	2	0.1	6	0.4
Hungary	6	0.4	8	0.6
Ireland	2	0.1	2	0.1
Israel	29	1.8	10	0.7
Italy	95	5.7	58	4.0
Latvia	2	0.1		
Lithuania	1	0.1	1	0.1
Malta			1	0.1
The Netherlands	28	1.7	29	2.0
Norway	5	0.3	8	0.6
Poland	10	0.6	7	0.5
Portugal	2	0.1	3	0.2
Romania			1	0.1
Russia	97	5.9	6	0.4
Slovak Republic	1	0.1	1	0.1
Slovenia	1	0.1	1	0.1
Spain	88	5.3	32	2.2
Sweden	51	3.1	18	1.3
Switzerland	38	2.3	24	1.7
Turkey			3	0.2
UK	163	9.9	89	6.2
EUROPE TOTAL	1032	63.3	546	37.9
Algeria			1	0.1
South Africa	1	0.1	5	0.3
Tunisia			1	0.1
AFRICA TOTAL	1	0.1	7	0.5
Hong Kong	7	0.4	3	0.2
India	16	1.0	17	1.2
Iran			4	0.3
Japan	242	14.6	307	21.3
Jordan			1	0.1
Kuwait			1	0.1
Malaysia			2	0.1
Pakistan			1	0.1
P. Rep. China	6	0.4	6	0.4
Singapore	4	0.2	1	0.1
South Korea	22	1.3	20	1.4
Taiwan	12	0.7	12	0.8
Thailand	1	0.1		
ASIA TOTAL	309	18.9	376	26.0
Argentina	3	0.2	2	0.1
Brazil	8	0.5	13	0.9
Chile	6	0.4	3	0.2
Colombia			1	0.1
Mexico	4	0.2	6	0.4
Puerto Rico			3	0.2
Trinidad and Tobago			1	0.1
Venezuela			4	0.3
Canada	40	2.4	38	2.6
USA	204	12.3	412	28.6
AMERICA TOTAL	265	16.2	477	33.1
Australia	21	1.3	22	1.5
New Zealand	3	0.2	6	0.4
AUSTRALASIA TOTAL	24	1.5	28	1.9
WORLD TOTAL	1631	100%	1440	100%
Free subscriptions			53	

^aIncludes direct subscriptions plus subscriptions placed through an agent in that country (possibly for distribution elsewhere).