

TWO SERVICES TO OUR READERS

“New Methods” Section

Readers will doubtless be interested in the results of the poll of subscribers conducted last year on the usefulness of the New Methods section. A large number (87%) of individual subscribers replied. Such a response is unusually large in a poll of this kind; it is indicative of your interest, and gratifying to the editors.

The answers to the questions

Do you look through the New Methods section as part of scanning each issue?

Is the section useful in your work?

Is the annual index of New Methods useful to you?

Would you object if this section were discontinued?

were overwhelmingly affirmative. For instance, only 5% answered “No” to the first question. Clearly, the section is regarded as extremely valuable, and there is no doubt in our minds that it should be continued. I wish at this time to convey publicly to Drs. Newman and Radin, who have compiled the list since the inception of the Journal, the thanks of the editorial board and of the many subscribers who commissioned me on their reply cards to do so.

Opinion was somewhat less unanimous on the question whether references to methods in steroid chemistry should be included; but since half of our American and a third of our foreign subscribers were in favor of them, we shall continue to include them.

Answers to the last question on the card revealed that many non-subscribers regularly scan the New Methods section in their colleagues’ copies of the Journal: on the average, four readers per copy. We are of course delighted with the dissemination of information that this implies, and pleased to think we have 4,000 rather than 1,000 “personal subscribers.” However, it is worth noting that these pages are the most expensive in the book to produce, involving complex typesetting, exacting proofreading, and checking of each entry for complete accuracy by consultation of the original source (as is done, incidentally, for every reference given throughout the Journal). Our costs would be more nearly balanced if some of these potential subscribers were listed in our subscription files. Won’t you consider persuading your colleagues to order their own copies of the Journal instead of borrowing yours?

Key Words and Phrases

Every scientist is becoming concerned over the problem of “keeping up with the literature” and of scanning the body of published work for information relevant to his field of interest. It is important that this be done thoroughly, yet he cannot permit this activity to consume all his waking hours. The retrieval of published information on specified topics is now undertaken by efficient abstracting services and computerized retrieval systems. More and more these groups are becoming oriented towards key words or phrases as the most

suitable information unit in classification and retrieval. For this reason we are introducing into this Journal, beginning with this issue, key words at the head of each article.

Our suggestions for selecting key words are as follows. “A list of key words, not exceeding 15 in number and including the major indexing words of the title, should be selected by the author. Words which indicate the problem attacked, the nature of the results, the species employed, the methods used (if new methods or mod-

ifications have been introduced), and any new compounds synthesized should be included. Whenever possible, single words should be used, phrases only when they are essential for clarity. Word repetition should be minimized. *Care should be taken to draw readers' attention to findings of incidental as well as central interest.*"

In editing the author's list of key words, our primary concern will be for their usefulness to individual readers, especially those not fortunate enough to have access to the professional retrieval services. What advantage over titles and summaries do key words offer you in your scanning of the literature?

Evidently, 15 key words can convey much more information than a title, yet are quicker to read than a summary. But a major further advantage is one not generally realized: key words can extend the information of a summary by indicating incidental findings which, though important to another worker, are not sufficiently germane to the subject of the article to be included

within the necessary limits of the summary. It is the incidental findings that are so easily, and unfortunately, lost.

During editorial revision, particular attention will be paid to possible omissions on the author's part. An attempt will be made to arrange the words in a sequence corresponding approximately to primary (subject of the article), secondary (e.g., modifications of methods or synthesis of new compounds), and tertiary entries (e.g., incidental findings or subjects strongly implicated in the Discussion).

The system cannot be expected to function perfectly at first. A very few other journals have launched key-word experiments and have done it in slightly different ways. Because of the importance of the problem of literature searching, we believe that active cooperation between authors, journals, and abstracting services is necessary for the development of more rapid and suitable methods of classifying and retrieving information than presently exist. Your comments are invited.

E. H. AHRENS, JR.