

## Review and Acceptance Procedure

**T**HIS year's editorial is devoted to the review, revision, and acceptance procedure of the *AIAA Journal*. This is of interest to not only our contributors, but also our readers—so that they know the effort which is made to ensure the validity and usefulness of our published papers.

I examine all incoming papers myself. If a paper fits the scope of a different AIAA journal, I reject that paper and suggest to which AIAA journal the author may resubmit the paper. This procedure is in accordance with the rules passed by the Publication Committee. However, for foreign papers, because of the postage expense and to avoid possible confusion for the authors, I retransmit those papers to the appropriate AIAA journal. Sometimes a paper is only weakly relevant to aerospace; this is rejected also together with suggestions for more appropriate journals.

I then assign the paper to an Associate Editor. Initially, the Associate Editor is anonymous to the author to relieve the AE of the burden of unnecessary phone calls and inquiries regarding the status of papers. The AE sends the paper out to usually three reviewers, and then makes a judgment based on the results of those reviews. Most of our reviewers are extremely conscientious in that they write a detailed commentary on the paper to help the author understand any technical problems that the reviewers detect in the paper. The reviewers also rate the paper. (A copy of AIAA's review report form is published in this issue.)

If the reviewers are unanimous in rating the paper as "fair," then it is extremely unlikely that the paper will be accepted for publication as a full-length paper even if it is revised. Correcting the errors that the reviewers found or making minor improvements just does not change the rating enough to warrant full-length publication. So we often suggest to the author that the paper be condensed into a Technical Note. My observation is that, if the author revises a full-length paper according to the detailed comments of the reviewers, it will still be considered for only a Technical Note.

What are the reasons that papers are rated only "fair"? The primary reason is that the paper has a very limited scope of applicability to aerospace problems. It is not enough that the author has solved a boundary-value problem that no one has solved. Or performed an experiment on a configuration that no one else has performed. Nor is it sufficient that we published on that topic previously for acceptance. The paper must have a solid relevance to aerospace. The aerospace industry's prosperity—and our jobs—depend on the performance and cost of aerospace hardware. Better understanding of some equation is important, but more important is its relevance to aerospace system performance and cost. There would be no aerospace industry if it cost a passenger \$10,000 to fly across the country or if each satellite cost \$10 billion. Thus, the *AIAA Journal* must be careful that it not become a journal of applied mathematics, computer solutions, or the observation of nature, as important as they may be in other areas. The downsizing of the aerospace industry will make the above even more imperative.

Incidentally, to understand how the journals of other societies handle the review process, I regularly submit some of my work to them. After six to eight months, I usually receive one short review together with a rejection notice. But the latter contains a caveat that if I revise my paper, the journal may reconsider it. Without fail, they have always accepted my revised paper. I believe that we

are much kinder than that: If a paper is worthy of publication with revisions, we inform the author of that. We distinguish between "revision" and a "decline." A paper which is revised after rejection also stands very little chance of publication, as noted above.

The downsizing of the aerospace industry is currently impacting our circulation, which has decreased by about a fifth since last year. It is for that reason that the *AIAA Journal* is now on two tracks: A for paid publication charges and B for unpaid publication charges. And I hope to fill the *AIAA Journal* with about 80% of the former (compared to about 60% in the past). If at some point we don't have enough A track papers to fill an issue, the size of the issue will be decreased accordingly, which will also help our budget.

I've run into two reactions to this policy. The first is simple: an author states that since he is paying for the cost of publication, he should get his paper published. However, the publication charges only cover about half the cost of publication. If the publication charges covered the entire cost of publication, then we would be just a vanity press, which is something that I hope that the *AIAA Journal* will avoid.

The other reaction is quite the opposite. Some authors claim a right to publish regardless of whether they have paid publication charges. I have letters stating that their sponsors require that their research results be published in the *AIAA Journal*. I also receive desperate telephone calls from authors who state that their promotion depends on acceptance of their paper to the *AIAA Journal*. If publication is so important, why isn't paying publication charges?

I also feel that advantage is taken of the AIAA journals. We have found that in many instances organizations who submit many papers to the AIAA journals rarely if ever pay publication charges. The general philosophy of research is that it isn't complete until it is published so that the rest of the world has access to it either immediately or through retrieval services. (And the retrieval services generally ignore the papers collected into a book.)

To end my message, I hope that each and every one of you will have a meaningful year in that you will accomplish the goals that are important to you. In addition, many thanks to Norma Brennan, Division Director, Journals, for keeping us out of the debtors' stocks, and Richard Babione for his fine editorial work. Also, thanks to our departing Associate Editors whose three-year term of office has just ended: Jan Lepicovsky, Mike Myers, and Max Platzter. Their hard work helped maintain the quality of the *AIAA Journal*. Finally, thanks are due from all of us to our unsung reviewers, whose names follow.

George W. Sutton  
Editor-in-Chief

