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On Our Future and Present Publication Practices

Whither Journals? Whatever Became of SDD?

The socio-political foment in America today has its impact on, and is reflected to some degree in, all AIAA activities. Our Membership, our Sections and Committees, and our Board of Directors ponder questions of proper and effective roles for AIAA to play in the shifting scenes. Their deliberations include vigorous discussions and diverse opinions on the roles of our journals and on the alternatives for effective dissemination of information. Many feel that our journals are too staid, strait-laced, and slow. Yet the technical and scientific portion of our membership, upon reflection, always recognizes the lasting value of publications that present formally reviewed and edited papers that accurately record our accomplishments and stepwise progress. Should not the magnificent technical achievements of the Apollo program, for example, be available in our journals for present and future use? Do not we, the AIAA, hold and wish to maintain a pre-eminent position here? What can our publications do to grow and respond to changing needs without sacrificing necessary quality?

Many of you have heard about a program called Selective Dissemination of Documents (SDD). A variation of this concept is "personalized journals." In a modest SDD experiment in 1967, some 500 AIAA members received early mailings of preprints and journal articles in their selected fields, and their response was highly favorable. Cost appears to be the main problem for such a plan. Unfortunately, it is *not*, at present, cheaper to give you only the papers you want, even if such a plan is limited to current, off-the-press, AIAA publications. However, there is hope that machines and techniques presently in the research stage will make personalized journals economically feasible within a few years. A specific research task in this area, including a study of alternatives, was proposed by the AIAA to the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1968 and received an enthusiastic response. However, the NSF's own fiscal problems have led to delays and reduced project goals that remain unresolved at this writing. The AIAA Publications Committee continues its search for the best plan for progress.

What Happened to My Paper?

Mrs. Anne Huth, our Managing Editor, hears this question* frequently, and there are many possible answers. Editors, reviewers, staff members, the U.S. Mails, and/or the author himself may have contributed to delays in various ways, to various degrees, for various reasons. No one deliberately holds up a paper, but it is fair to say that an editor or reviewer is more likely to procrastinate over a paper that presents a problem in some respect (too long, hard to read, sloppily prepared). However, if you have submitted a paper and have heard nothing for three months or more, you may inquire as to its status, and we will run a check for you. Because many people are involved in processing a paper, and you may have wondered just how we do it, the following history of a typical paper for the *Journal of Spacecraft and Rockets* (*JSR*) may be of interest.†

1) A paper received by the Editorial Office is logged, acknowledged, and sent to the Editor-in-Chief (E-i-C).

2) The E-i-C makes an initial evaluation and sends it to the appropriate Associate Editor (AE) or to another of the four journals, or he rejects it if it is clearly inappropriate for a journal.

3) The AE may recommend rejection (for *JSR*, all final decisions are approved by the E-i-C) but usually selects two reviewers and one alternate and returns it to the staff.

4) The staff sends it to the reviewers, allowing three weeks, and follows up with two prod letters and/or telephone calls if necessary.

5) The staff sends the reviews and copies of prior editorial comments to the AE.

6) The AE evaluates the package and returns it to the staff with instructions for a letter to the author. Or, if at this point he recommends rejection, he sends the package to the E-i-C for final decision.

7) The staff checks the paper for conformity with our publishing requirements and writes to the author, enclosing review reports or appropriate portions thereof, with the editors' comments and requests for revision, if any. The author is normally allowed six weeks for revision.

8) The staff checks the revised paper. If appreciable revision was requested, the package with all related correspondence is returned to the AE. (If specific minor revisions were requested and made, the paper moves to step 11.)

9) The AE makes a technical check. He may return the paper to the reviewers if they have so requested or if he thinks the author has not responded to important technical criticisms which are outside his own knowledge. However, he tries to make the decision himself (to avoid "ping-pong" situations between authors and reviewers) and forwards the package to the E-i-C with his recommendations.

10) The E-i-C makes his final check, which may include some editing for conciseness if the paper is still unnecessarily long. In rare cases, the paper may be returned to the author for technical clarifications or further tightening.

11) Upon the E-i-C's release of the paper, the staff "copy edits" it for the printer. Their task is to make it more readable and precise with respect to grammar, identification of symbols and abbreviations, and format for footnotes, tables, and references. (They may find that figures are still unacceptable for publication, *frequently because lettering is too small*, and may have to return a paper to the author again for this reason alone. *Vector notation* is another fre-

* Again Editor Goudsmit of the American Institute of Physics has discussed, with insight and humor, a situation that is closely paralleled in AIAA. See *Physics Today*, Vol. 22, May 1969, pp. 23–25.

† Practices vary slightly among the four journals, particularly on items 9 and 10, but the major steps and times required are similar.

quent problem.) The carefully and profusely marked manuscript is then sent to the printer.

12) Galley proofs are sent to the author with notes in margins at points where the printer, editor, or staff has noted something still awry.

13) The staff incorporates the author's corrections and carefully proofs the galleys.

14) The E-i-C provides a desired order of papers for composing an issue of the journal; the Managing Editor selects enough papers to fill the issue (using, insofar as possible, those received earliest), has the galleys marked for page composition, and orders page proofs.

15) The staff checks the page proofs against the corrected galley proofs and returns them with final instructions to the printer, who prints and binds the journal.

Items 1–7 normally take about three months. They involve twelve to fifteen separate mailings or pieces of correspondence and numerous entries in the record-keeping systems of the editors and staff.)‡ Items 8–10 normally take two to four months, depending chiefly on the author himself, and involve four to six more mailings and further record keeping. Items 11–15 require a minimum of two months, *if* the author returns his galley proofs promptly as requested. Holdovers because of full issues rarely exceed one month for *JSR*.

During its six years of existence, *JSR* has received an average of 600 submissions per year. An AE (*JSR* has six) usually sees each paper in his field three times, and the E-i-C sees every paper two to four times. (The *AIAA Journal* has an appreciably larger flow; the other two journals, smaller ones.) With our great dependence on the U.S. Post Office and on Editors and Reviewers who do this work primarily as an after-hours adjunct to their regular jobs and other activities, is it not remarkable that we do reasonably well?

Timeliness is extremely important in some rapidly moving fields, yet our system takes seven to ten months—sometimes more than a year—to get a paper published. What can we do about it? We can chastise or replace slow AE's. We can attempt to blacklist slow reviewers (but the best are usually busiest!), and we can try to find ways to make the reviewer's job easier, or at least reduce his human tendency for procrastination. We are considering a simpler looking review form, which may appeal to some. But we, and you as authors, appreciate most the thoughtful and detailed technical comments that the better reviewers make. Such comments take a great deal of time regardless of any other considerations about a review form. Finally, we can attempt to automate our record-keeping. But how many of you have been infuriated by a department store that sent you the wrong bill four or five times in succession? (Some have even suffered from errors by our automated membership and circulation operations!)

We do want to treat your papers fairly, intelligently, and constructively. We would like to be paragons of all virtues in your eyes. But sometimes when we are rushed or weary, we may err by using words that seem unnecessarily harsh or tactless to you, or we may forget to mention that certain suggestions by two reviewers are in conflict and ask you to "accomodate the reviewers' comments" without noting this fact. We deeply regret such slips and ask your understanding. On the other hand, blunt language (or outright rejection) may sometimes be justified because of an extremely poor job of preparation for submission to a journal. Please do not send us poorly prepared papers or long, redundant company reports "to see if we would be interested," because there usually is no answer to that question without the full review process (the foregoing steps 1–7). The scope statements published on the inside front covers of our journals are carefully worded and are revised at reasonable intervals. Please refer to them when in doubt, and *please* make use of the "Information for Contributors" on the inside back cover.

‡ All primary records are kept by the staff in New York. The technical editors do not retain copies of papers or of all correspondence, but most of them keep minimal records for their own use.

Engineering Notes

The Engineering Note (EN) is intended to be one means of more rapid publication for a small unit of technical information that is timely and of interest to a considerable number of readers but is a) limited in scope or b) in the nature of a concise progress report that should not wait until a full paper is ready. An EN is not formally reviewed in the same way that a full paper is. Normally, the E-i-C and/or one AE will decide on acceptance or rejection of an EN. Although the *AIAA Journal* has had a perennial flood of Technical Notes (TN), the engineers and space scientists working in the fields covered by *JSR* have not fully recognized the merits and use of the EN medium.

Many of the papers preprinted for AIAA meetings and subsequently submitted to *JSR* have been, in content, in the EN category. The fact that they may have been written hastily to meet a preprint deadline and, as submitted, were longer than EN's, does not alter this fact. Authors of preprints could do themselves and us a great favor by considering, at the time of submission of a preprint to the Meetings Department, and before replying to an inquiry about publication from the Publications Department, the following questions:

1) Is this paper ready for formal review by my peers as a regular journal paper?

2) Is it, in fact, more appropriate for submission as an EN?

3) Is rapid publication desirable?

If the answer to the first question is negative, you may wish to do some revision before submission to improve the quality and chances for acceptance of a full paper. If the answers to questions 2 and 3 are affirmative, you could save several months of publication time (if accepted) and earn some warm spots in our hearts by carefully pruning the paper before you submit it to us.

A word about length of EN's. Although the traditional statement has been that a Note normally should be $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of a full paper, which would limit it to, say, 6 double-spaced text pages and 3 figures (or less than 3 preprint pages total), we will consider lengths up to 50% greater for *JSR* (say, 8 double-spaced pages and 5 figures) if the material is useful, essential to the story, and concisely prepared.

On Overdoing the Publication Bit

We have run into several shocking instances where authors have submitted essentially the same paper to several journals, even though they sign statements that "this paper or its equivalent has not been submitted for publication elsewhere." No journal can truly afford such duplication today, and no author should be so desperate for a list of publications as to risk the enmity of his peers by such a practice. We hope that one of the journals of the AIAA will be the first choice for the better papers in the fields we cover, but we wish to avoid duplication of other terminal publications. By "terminal publication" we mean another journal, book, NASA TN, "low-number" NASA Contractor Report, or an official "proceedings" volume from a technical meeting. Preprints not advertised as part of an official, final proceedings, are not considered to be terminal publications, nor are company reports. We consider the unclassified NASA TN's and low-number CR's to be terminal publications because they are reviewed and have very large distributions.

Our Editors

Three of our Associate Editors, David H. Garber, John E. Miller, and John C. Houbolt have just completed their three

years of arduous service. As you know, Dr. Houbolt is now our Vice-President—Technical Activities.

Three new Associate Editors are Francis French, Donald C. Fraser, and Harry L. Runyan. We are pleased to welcome them aboard. William Mickelsen, Bernard Miller, and Yusuf Yoler are continuing. We, and the fine editorial staff under Mrs. Anne Huth, hope to serve you well.

Gordon L. Dugger
Editor-in-Chief

Reviewers for *Journal of Spacecraft and Rockets*, October 1, 1968–September 30, 1969*

WE take this annual opportunity to acknowledge, with great pleasure, the assistance received from reviewers. Conscientious review and constructive criticism of our papers is a vital part of our system, as indicated in our "Acceptance Procedure for Archive Journals of AIAA," which appeared in the first issue of each of our journals in 1965.

Thoughtful, detailed reviews are sincerly appreciated by both the authors and the editors. Every comment made by a reviewer is carefully considered. If the editors decide that a paper should be published (or rejected) against the advice of a reviewer, it is done only after all evidence from the other reviewer(s) and the author has been carefully weighed. Even in such cases, you probably will recognize that the quality of the accepted paper(s) has been improved as a result of your enlightened criticism.

For the help you gave us in 1969 and may give us in 1970 and in future years, we say a very warm "thank you."

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R. Anderson
Fred Austin
R. M. L. Baker Jr.
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William W. Balwanz
Donald R. Bartz
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T. Koga
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Martin K. Winkler
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Robert Worlock
C. L. Yates
L. Yorgy
Hideo Yoshihara

* Because it is difficult to include the reviewers for October, November, and December 1969 in this issue of the Journal, they will be listed with the reviewers for 1970, in the January 1971 issue.