

Correct Is Not Enough

In his valedictory editorial in *Nature* last December, John Maddox pointed out that Crick and Watson's article on the structure of DNA might easily be rejected for publication under current norms for refereeing. "It's all modelling...," "pure speculation..." and "...relies on unpublished data from another lab" are but a few of the negative comments that could be anticipated. This sort of critique often draws a strong, even heated, response from authors.


What do we do editorially to maintain high standards while not squelching real, innovative material? This is the essential editorial question and has been an active subject of discussion among the *Journal's* Board of Consulting Editors. Maddox's account of what might have happened behind the scenes includes ways of easing the article's passage to publication, which I don't think would or should happen in the present climate.

Our conclusion is that some subtle but important changes are warranted in the criteria for accepting articles to be published. The basic thrust of the changes is that technical accuracy alone is not good enough for publication. We want the articles we publish to deal with important advances of general significance to chemical engineering. That there is nothing technically wrong with an article is not reason enough to publish it in the *Journal*. We recognize that some articles will include material with potential significance, which is difficult to assess before publication. Our intention is to identify those sorts of articles and to prefer

them to incremental additions to well developed or narrow subareas. This won't be easy. I know from experience as Editor and referee that we, as referees, tend to appreciate (or at least review favorably) increments to our specialties.

Maintaining the contents of the *Journal* at the highest levels of discovery and significance will require a cooperative effort among the referees, authors, Associate Editors, and myself. We will, in the near future, change both the "Instructions for Contributors" and refereeing forms to reflect these ideas better by asking both authors and referees (in different ways) to explain why an article should be published and to be more explicit in describing its real or potential significance. Editorial decisions will have to be incisive and well explained to authors.

Our aim is not to decline more articles for publication or to shrink the size of the *Journal*. Our acceptance rate in 1996 was 44%, which is already a high standard (a higher-than-even chance that an article would be declined). And we currently publish 50% more pages annually than we did two years ago. Rather, we intend to keep pushing its content to the very forefront of our profession.



Matthew Tirrell
Editor