

All those papers, where do they come from?



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Since 2002, EurJOC has seen an average yearly increase in submitted manuscripts of 11 % (see Figure 1). On the one hand, this is a pleasing development – it is a substantial growth but not impossible to cope with. On the other hand, one might assume that this greater manuscript flow must negatively impinge on the workload of the referees. Remarkably, this is not the case: Whereas each manuscript was evaluated by 2.47 referees on average in 2003, this number dropped to 2.05 in 2005. In other words, we have become more reviewer-efficient in spite of the higher number of manuscripts that we have received. How come? One reason is that revised papers are resent to referees in fewer cases; another reason is that not every new manuscript is necessarily sent to referees. Instead, incoming manuscripts are first examined as to whether they fit into the scope of the journal and then whether they are likely to be of interest to the broad and diverse readership of the journal. At this stage, papers may be rejected outright, in some instances after consulting with a board member. This course of action helps to reduce the workload of the referees, but is also beneficial to the authors, who may better judge the significance of their paper and submit it to a more appropriate journal without significant delay. Incidentally, it has even been advocated to make a fast editorial decision merely on

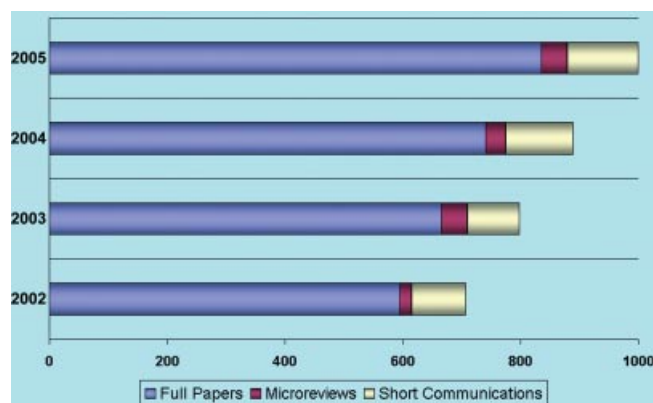


Figure 1. Development of manuscript submission from 2002 to 2005.

the basis of the abstract of a paper (see S. Schroter, H. Barratt, *European Science Editing* **2004**, 30(1), 8–9). I, for one, believe that such practice is overshooting the mark, and you can be assured that I will always take the time to have a complete look at a paper before I make a judgment. You cannot judge a book by its cover, so they say. Hence you possibly cannot judge a paper by its abstract.

Of course, the policy of declining some papers directly does not imply that we will gradually dismiss the peer-review system in consequence of the increase in submitted manuscripts. Of all rejected papers, 90 % were still declined on the basis of the referee recommendations. The overall rejection rate, by the way, is currently 42 %.

Sir Winston Churchill once said about democracy: “No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” Likewise, although peer review may not be perfect, it remains the best evaluation system in scientific publishing. Also, one should not think about peer review solely in terms of acceptance or rejection. One should rather bear in mind that for the most part it serves to increase the quality of a paper, no matter if it has been accepted or rejected. “I would also like to thank our reviewers for valuable comments, which helped us to improve the manuscript.” – I regularly read statements like this one in cover letters to revised papers, which tells me that the referees did an excellent job.

If the peer-review system is not perfect, what can be done to improve it? Occasionally it has been proposed to withhold the author's identity from the referees so as to diminish any bias and thus to render possible a fairer reviewing process. This so-called double-

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blind peer review – an alternative to the more common single-blind procedure – has been discussed controversially in the peer-review literature (for example, see D. Cox, L. Gleser, M. Perlman, N. Reid, K. Roeder, *Statistical Science* **1993**, 8, 310–317). Although there are journals that apply double-blind peer review, as far as I know no chemistry journal is among them. “Why is that so?”, I have been asked a few times, “And why does EurJOC not apply this policy?”

There are some obvious reasons. First of all, manuscripts have to be prepared before they can be forwarded to the referees because any clue to the author’s persona – not only the address but also all references etc.

Double-blind vs. single-blind peer review

– has to be deleted. This is hardly feasible since a chemistry paper should have an instructive introduction in which the present work is put in the proper context of previous papers including pertinent articles by the author him- or herself. Even if the editorial staff does well in preparing the manuscripts, the referees would often be able to deduce who the author is. Sometimes they may be right with their assumption, but they may also be totally wrong and might then be biased in disfavour of the supposed author and to the disadvantage of the actual author. All things considered, single-blind peer review will continue to be the way to go for EurJOC.

In rare cases reviewers seem to try to avoid any impression of positive predisposition – to me reminiscent of the Willa Frank character in T. C. Boyle’s short story “Sorry Fugu”. She is a notorious restaurant critic who pulls to pieces any place she visits, however excellent the cooking abilities of the chef and the reputation of the establishment. But as it turns out, she does so for her lack of self-assurance: “To like something, to really like it and come out and say so, is taking a terrible risk. I mean, what if I’m wrong?” This is an interesting question! What if a referee is wrong? Well, it can happen from time to time – to err is human after all. This is the major reason why, as a rule, two referees are chosen for each paper. In any case, referees are not restaurant critics. In the end it is the editor’s responsibility to make a decision on the basis of the recommendations of the referees – after all, their reports are *recommendations* and not instructions. It is my duty to read the reports, sometimes also to read between the lines, and to interpret the statements, taking into account my own impression of the paper. In the event that a wrong decision is made, there is always the possibility of appealing against the decision even though I recommend not to appeal when it is only a matter of different opinions: “New referees may have new views. When you get new referees, you cannot preclude any new criticisms.” (anonymous court-of-appeal referee).

Another question often raised by EurJOC authors concerns suggesting or ruling out referees. According to two recent studies, “suggesting or excluding reviewers can help get your paper published” (see D. Grimm, *Science* **2005**, 309,

1974). I would not go so far as to concur with that statement. Nevertheless, both suggesting and excluding reviewers can facilitate the reviewing process. You are thus welcome to name referees when you submit a manuscript to EurJOC. Whether or not the manuscript is forwarded to a nominated referee depends on several aspects, leaving aside the not too rare cases in which suggested referees are no longer active researchers – or are even deceased. Of course, the author cannot know whether the requested reviewer has Willa Frank tendencies – or is a yes-man, for that matter, in which case his/her opinion would not be solicited. Also, a manuscript would never deliberately be sent to a former mentor, student, or lab-mate of the author. But even if the suggested person is a suitable referee, it could be advisable to choose someone else who, for example, had assessed a thematically related paper recently. On the other hand, justified requests to exclude certain referees will be honoured.

I do not want to end this digression into peer review without expressing my thanks and gratitude to the key persons in peer reviewing – the referees! Keeping the standards of the journal high would not be possible without you, regardless of how many more papers we will receive in the future. I really do appreciate the time you take to prepare your helpful reports. One last remark, though: The vast majority of manuscripts we receive are written by people whose mother tongue is not English. It is understandable that only some papers are flawless in terms of language and style, and referees may be tempted to comment on these aspects of a paper exhaustively – or even exclusively. Please keep in mind, however, that EurJOC is one of the few remaining chemistry journals that offer an excellent language-polishing service. If you notice grammar and spelling mistakes you are welcome to mention this in your report, and you might want to recommend moderate or intense language polishing. But the primary concern of the referee should be the scientific content.

Another big thank you goes to Henning Hopf who has retired from the Editorial Board, which he served ever since the journal was founded, including three years as senior editor and thereafter as chairman after an in-house editorial office had been set up. He brought with him the experience he accumulated on the Boards of *Liebigs Annalen* and *Chemische Berichte*, two of the predecessor journals of EurJOC and EurJIC, respectively. At the same time, he played an active role in the Executive Committee of the German Chemical Society (GDCh). As the Publishing Officer, he contributed substantially to the merger of the aforementioned journals with those of the other European chemical societies who are now members of EUCHEM Soc. At present he is still President of the GDCh. To the community Henning Hopf is well known as a renowned expert in the chemistry of hydrocarbons and, in particular, cyclophanes. Therefore it appears to be quite

Changes in the Editorial and International Advisory Boards

logical that he is author of “Classics in Hydrocarbon Chemistry” and co-editor (together with Rolf Gleiter, member of the International Advisory Board of EurJOC) of “Modern Cyclophane Chemistry”.

Henning Hopf is succeeded by Norbert Krause, who joined the International Advisory Board one year ago. Vacant positions on the International Advisory Board will be taken up by Antonio Echavarren, Andreas Hirsch, Ulrich Koert, and Peter Schreiner. Over and above that, the International Advisory Board has been slightly expanded this time: Taking into account that in 2005 9% of all manuscripts received were from Mainland China and about the same number of manuscripts from India (see Figure 2) it is more than appropriate to have representatives from these two countries as well. I thus welcome Kuiling Ding and Goverdhan Mehta as new members of our International Advisory Board.

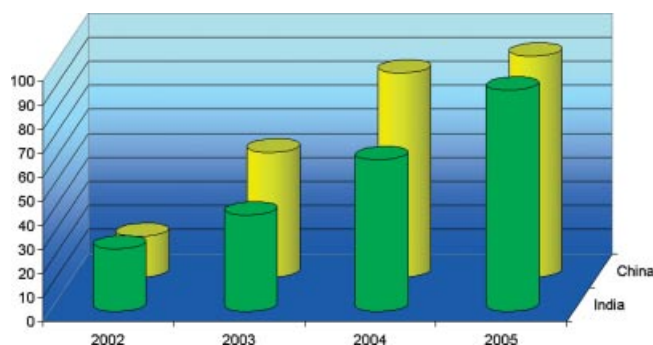


Figure 2. EurJOC has witnessed a particularly remarkable increase in submitted manuscripts from India and China.

Returning to the topic of *Liebigs Annalen* and *Chemische Berichte*, I am pleased to announce that both journals will soon be available electronically – and completely – as part of the Chemistry Societies Backfile Collection: 27,100 articles from *Liebigs Annalen* (from 1832 to 1997) and 57,270 articles from *Chemische Berichte* (from 1868 to 1997) will

be fully searchable. The other two journals are *Angewandte Chemie* and the first three volumes of *Chemistry – A European Journal*. In total the Chemistry Societies Backfile Collection comprises more than 872,000 pages (see <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/collectionhome/CSCOL/HOME>). There is also a new useful feature in

**New: Chemistry Societies
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Wiley InterScience termed “Citation Tracking”: Choose a EurJOC article – or any article from any other journal in Wiley InterScience – and click on “Abstract” or “References” first and then on “Citation Tracking”. The result is a list of other papers that cite the article that you have chosen. But not only articles that are available on Wiley InterScience are listed – also articles from other publishers, provided they are members of CrossRef (to find out more about CrossRef, see www.crossref.org).



Naturally, an editorial in the first issue of a year should not end without compliments of the season. This time we even have a seasonable cover picture – a pyrotechnical masterpiece from the group of J.-F. Nierengarten. I wish you a pleasant year 2006!

Raymond Bor