
EDITORIAL



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Editor

"The Unsung Heroes"

The *Journal of Electronic Imaging*, like many other scientific journals, is a "refereed" journal. That is, every paper submitted for publication is reviewed by at least two referees. Much has been written about this peer review process, about whether or not referees should remain anonymous, whether it tends to suppress really new, perhaps radical, ideas, etc. For better or worse, the following is a description of the process currently used for JEI.

The referees are all volunteers. The editors try to select experts in the precise topic of the paper. Most often, the referees asked to review papers are known personally by the editor or associate editor. Sometimes, however, the referee is known only by his or her scientific reputation. Occasionally, a paper builds primarily on someone else's previous work. In that case, one of the referees asked is often the person whose work is cited. For a case in which the paper combines previously separate specialties, each referee may be an expert in one of the previously separate topics.

When a referee is asked to review a paper, the prospective referee must first decide whether he or she has the knowledge and the time to review the paper. Editors are not infallible—we may ask someone who does not feel qualified in the specialty of the paper. Also, most referees work for a living and we cannot know their other time pressures. Remember, all referees are volunteers! Our prospective authors, we are sure, would prefer that a referee refuse the task, rather than hold up publication by not responding in a reasonable time.

Journals differ in their review procedures. Most, including JEI, keep the referees anonymous. Some journals also try to hide the author's identity. At JEI, we feel that if our referees are experts, 90% of the time they will recognize whose work it is anyway and, therefore, attempts to hide the author's identity are not productive. Moreover, how many times does the paper say "in our previous paper, Reference 2," which immediately identifies the author.

Another difference is that some journals send out forms with questions for

the reviewers to answer. JEI relies on the referees' judgment as to what parts need comment. To date, we have found that our procedure has worked very well. Reviews are usually quite specific and tend to be longer for papers that need more revision. We have never received a review saying simply "don't publish"; referees have given very specific reasons for their comments. The only short reviews have been recommendations to publish. We expect, and get, comments on technical content (is it correct, is it new?), comments on presentation (is it clear, concise?), and comments on whether it is an appropriate topic for JEI.

Once the reviews are back, we notify the author and, if revisions are suggested, we send copies of the reviews. Occasionally, we will add our own comments; for example, if one referee asks for more additional work than seems reasonable, we may temper the requests. On the somewhat rare occasion when the two referees differ strongly in their views, we offer guidance as to which comments seem more to the point. If a paper is revised in major ways, we will often send the revised manuscript back to one or both of the original referees for a second review.

In our publication process, I nominate our referees as "unsung heroes." Their work is voluntary and they not only receive no money, but they receive no visible credit. The satisfaction they do get, however, is to see that better papers appear than would be there without their work. Frequently, referees are frustrated because not all their comments are incorporated in the final paper. Once in a great while, an author acknowledges the anonymous referee for his helpful suggestions. Most of our referees take the job very seriously and try to be specific, accurate, and prompt. The process of peer review keeps our technical quality high and could not be done without the work of our referees.

If we have somehow missed you as a referee and you would like to join the ranks of those who serve without recognition, please drop us a note with a brief biography and a list of the topics you feel qualified to review.