

Policy, procedures, and goals at JOSA A: editorial

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Editorial policy and procedures are described for the benefit of potential authors and reviewers. These policies are described in the context of our goals for the journal. © 2015 Optical Society of America

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1. INTRODUCTION

The journals of the Optical Society (OSA) are a natural extension of the services the society provides to its members and to the larger mission of the OSA: “to promote the generation, application and archiving of knowledge in optics and photonics...” In particular, at JOSA A, we are dedicated to archiving advances in the field, to providing content that will serve as a reference, and to enabling the work of researchers for years to come. We hope the journal reflects the perspectives and insight of the global community working in optics.

The work we publish today builds on a legacy of foundational research in classical optics, image science, and vision [1], to pave the way for future discovery and innovation in these fields. The subfields covered by JOSA A are enunciated on the journal information page <https://www.osapublishing.org/josaa/journal/josaa/about.cfm>. Moreover, JOSA A remains the home for general results in optics.

With the number of scientific papers published every year increasing at nearly double-digit annual percentages [2], our standards for quality and our selectivity must also rise to new levels. We wish to take this opportunity to outline editorial policies and procedures at JOSA A, to clarify our standards for acceptance of manuscripts, and to share our goals for the journal.

2. EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

Authors wishing to submit manuscripts to JOSA A must do so through our online system. For first-time submissions, a cover letter is not required but is encouraged. A well-crafted cover letter may help the editor to quickly understand the novelty and justification for publication and may communicate those points in a more colloquial fashion than is done in the paper. For resubmissions of papers that have been rejected from JOSA A or other OSA journals, a cover letter is required and must explain why reconsideration of the paper is warranted. Papers rejected for quality of English are most easily justified for reconsideration once the writing has been improved. For

papers previously rejected for scientific objections regarding correctness or novelty, this justification must be clear and strong. We do not consider resubmission to be an extension of the review process of the previous submission and will only consider these resubmissions in exceptional cases. We most strongly discourage the resubmission to JOSA A of papers previously rejected by other OSA journals for scientific objections. Transfers of manuscripts by the editors, either from Optica after review there, or from any OSA journal for reasons of scope, do not require an additional cover letter unless there are reviewer comments to be addressed.

Once manuscripts have entered the system, OSA staff checks them for compliance with journal requirements and may ask authors for corrections as needed. The manuscript then goes to the editor-in-chief (EiC) or deputy editor (DE) for initial consideration and possible assignment to a topical editor (TE). The EiC, DE, or TE may decide to reject the manuscript without review, usually if it is out of scope or does not represent a clear advance over previously published results. Rejection without review allows authors to seek a more appropriate venue for publication of their work at the earliest opportunity.

Once a manuscript goes into review, our goal is to obtain at least two reports, though sometimes a decision may be made on the basis of one clear and decisive opinion. In the event of mixed reviews, a third opinion may be sought or the editor may exercise his/her own judgment. A negative review or a review asking for major revisions at this stage will tend to carry weight over a positive review because we prefer to allow authors the opportunity to respond and improve the manuscript, which typically results in a higher-quality published paper.

Requests for major revisions require a serious commitment by the authors. Revised manuscripts are often seen again by the original reviewers, and manuscripts not adequately addressing the original concerns are likely to be rejected. In some cases, where the original concerns and the responses are clear, the editor may act without sending the manuscript back to reviewers.

Once a paper has been accepted, it goes through a copy editing and composition stage. During this stage, authors receive proofs and should carefully check those proofs within two days. Authors must pay mandatory charges for papers that are over length (exceeding 10 pages), require color printing, or to make papers publicly available immediately via open access. Otherwise, charges are voluntary, and we encourage authors to consider supporting the journal this way. Papers are then published online [3] and appear in hard copy in the next available printed edition of the journal. Outstanding papers with broad appeal may be nominated by the TE to be reviewed for OSA's Spotlight on Optics program, <https://www.osapublishing.org/spotlight/>.

3. WRITING MATTERS

We are privileged to live in an era unparalleled in the number of people professionally engaged in science and engineering. With so much work being reported and so many venues in which to report, clarity and organization of writing are absolutely necessary for that work to have an impact and be recognized. Clarity and quality have always been a part of our review criteria and going forward will weigh heavily in editorial decisions early in the process, when papers are considered for review, and late in the process after reviewers have reported. Papers hindered by significant language errors will be returned to the authors without review. Even if the English is technically sound, papers that are badly organized and unnecessarily difficult to read may also be returned without review. We believe that this is in the best interest of our readers, our reviewers, and, ultimately, of our authors whose work deserves to be read. For authors, a well-written paper is more likely, in the end, to receive positive reviews and be published.

4. JUDGING IMPACT

We ask reviewers to judge the potential impact of papers under review, and we take this opinion seriously. It is also up to editors to consider the potential impact of a paper in the community. Papers found to be of little impact or interest may be returned to authors without review.

What do we mean by impact? Certainly, a paper that otherwise meets our criteria and that we judge will be highly cited

immediately on publication will be accepted. However, we take a long view and are proud of the fact that the so-called cited half-life of papers in JOSA A exceeds 10 years [4]. Thus, papers acceptable in JOSA A may be expected to steadily be cited over many years and, thus, meet our criteria for impact. In exceptional cases, a paper may not be expected to be frequently cited, but the editors may judge that it is otherwise a good service to the community by perhaps finally ending a controversy or by providing instructive material for students and new researchers. Such papers are welcome at JOSA A. Niche papers that present incremental advances or do not provide enabling details lack impact in our view and, thus, are not suitable for JOSA A.

5. A BRIGHT FUTURE

The procedures described above are, in the end, not the important message of this editorial. The driving force in our work comprises the goals of serving the membership of the OSA, disseminating important results to the broader optics community, and archiving advances for the researchers who follow us. We are always willing to adopt new policies that help us to meet these goals, to revise old policies that hinder, or to consider exceptional cases. We invite and value comments to help us in our stewardship of the journal. We are excited about the direction of the journal and the continuing enthusiasm of our readers, authors, reviewers, and topical editors. Many thanks to all of you.

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