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Editorial

Christmas Editorial 1991

Two years have elapsed since the *BJO* appeared in its new form. During this time the editor has received a few comments from readers – most of them favourable; people seem to like the new layout. The first wave of mini-reviews appears also to have been appreciated and a new series is now being assembled. Would-be authors need not be shy in offering mini-reviews but, as with original papers, acceptance can be by no means guaranteed.

Speaking of original papers perhaps a word or two of information might be of interest to readers. The number of papers submitted to the journal has increased during the past year. There was a time two or three years ago, when our publication delay extended to almost two years, when new papers began to dry up. This certainly helped the publication delay as there was a period when very few papers were accepted without any notable ones having to be turned down. Because of the recent increase in the number of papers submitted however, the position has now been reached where all suitable papers cannot be accepted without the publication delay lengthening again, so that the polite rejection of a paper on the grounds of 'no room' is now no longer a courteous way of saying that a paper is not up to standard but may be literally true.

How therefore can authors maximise their chances of acceptance? There is an excellent article on the subject by Frank Newell with reference to acceptance by the *American Journal of Ophthalmology*¹ and would-be authors are certainly advised to consult this since all it says about the needs of the *AJO* applies equally to the *BJO*. In addition to following Frank Newell's excellent advice our instructions to authors, printed on the inside of the front cover, should of course be adhered to as well. It is surprising how many authors fail to have their manuscripts decently typed in reasonably good English, together with a copy. Loss between the office and the referee can occasionally occur and if there is no copy considerable delay, if not complete disaster, is inevitable. Although it is not printed in the 'instructions' common sense would dictate that authors number their pages so that the

referee can refer to a query on page x line y, etc, but it is amazing how many authors fail to number the pages. (A specific request for this is to be added to the instructions.) Obviously this sort of thing will not get a paper rejected if the scientific content is satisfactory but in a competitive situation every little helps; an irritated referee is not an author's best friend.

As far as the content is concerned what one seeks first is originality. There is little point in publishing material, however carefully worked up and beautifully presented, if the average reader is likely to know about it already. Thus although scientific validity, correct statistical analysis, and excellent illustrations are all highly desirable, the paper that is most favoured is one which, ophthalmologically speaking, is news. One or two snags crop up regularly and may prejudice prompt acceptance.

An example is the pitfall of using statistics based on populations of 'eyes' as opposed to patients especially where some are the right and left eyes but others single eyes from individual patients. Significance levels based upon such populations are likely to be distorted by the fact that the pairs of eyes are not true independent variables.²

Such mixed populations need special statistical treatment. The simplest way is to use only one eye from each patient by some form of random selection, or sometimes by splitting the study into right and left eyes. Under some circumstances averaging the results of a pair of eyes will do but the essential thing is that the 'n' number in any calculation should not exceed the number of patients in each study.

It remains for me to wish all *BJO* readers a Happy Christmas and it is hoped that readers will not be affected by prandial presbyopia as they peruse their *BJOs* during Christmas dinner (see the paper in this issue by Hudson *et al*).

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1 Newell FW. To publish in the Journal. *Am J Ophthalmol* 1988; 105: 87–8.

2 Newcombe RG, Duff R. Eyes or patients? Traps for the unwary in the statistical analysis of ophthalmological studies. *Br J Ophthalmol* 1987; 71: 645–6.