



Spurious Publication Dates

SINCE it is established practice in scientific publications to give priority for reporting of scientific discoveries in accordance with the publication date of the journal carrying the report, the practice of some journals of placing a date on their issues that differs materially from the date of actual appearance becomes of importance.

Many of our American journals are received during the stated month of issue, but some we never get until 2 to 3 months after the date. Similarly, we receive European journals, many in the month following publication date, one weekly arriving regularly 17 to 20 days after publication, but some never arriving less than 2 to 4 months after date.

In both of these sets of late arrivals, which are consistent for certain journals, we are forced to conclude that the date imprinted on these journals is not the date of actual publication but rather perhaps the date of transit from the editor to the printer?

Should we regard a report in one of these journals appearing with a date in December of the previous year but not received until March as publication prior to a report in another journal bearing a January or February date and actually received during January or February? I think not. Yet the index compilers will list the papers one in one year and the other in the next.

Perhaps dates of receipts for publication would be a better way of appraising priority. But here other difficulties present themselves. As any editor knows, not all papers are ready for publication when received,

and much time may elapse between receipt and sending to the printer, for various reasons. Hence papers in press are not available to readers for intervals varying from one week or so to more than a year. Papers "in press" are without influence on the progress of research in other institutions. Moreover, many journals do not print these dates of receipt. And, further, dates of receipt are ignored by the indexes.

The actual publication date should govern priority of publication, but it should be the real date of appearance and not a date 2 or 3 months earlier.

It is therefore urged that journals print on each issue the actual date or month of issue and that the date of receipt be included with each paper printed.

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For Science, the imprinted date is the date of publication and not, for instance, the date of transit from the editorial office to the printer. As for the date appearing at the end of each technical paper or communication, this is the date of receipt of the manuscript in the editorial office. If the manuscript must be returned to the author for substantial revision, the date of receipt of the revised copy is made the received date for the article.

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