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Science serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

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Letters to Science

The staff at *Science* strives to be aware of significant events and trends. But each country, state, institution, and department is a composite of diverse microcosms and often life and attitudes within the respective boundaries are those of worlds apart. Our staff opens windows on some of the many worlds by visits, by telephone, and by conversations with knowledgeable people. Of great value to us are various communications from our readers. These often lead to articles, to news stories, and even occasionally to changes in policy. A useful, multipurpose form of communication is the letter to the editor. Among the functions served by the letter are crucial help in quality control of material in the magazine, correction of factual errors, a sampling of reader opinion, and interchange of information among members of the scientific community.

Readers of a magazine called *Science* expect to find accurate information in it. Their expectations are higher for *Science* than for the major news weeklies. When readers find an error they are quick to let us know. This practice has a disciplinary effect on our staff.

Readers of *Science* are drawn from many disciplines and professional connections and they represent the entire spectrum of political beliefs. Thus their letters reflect widely diverse opinions and provide a sampling of a significant segment of society. Some of the letters deal with purely scientific topics that are specialized in nature; they are published as technical comments. Most of the letters, however, deal with controversial science and public policy issues. Scientists are trained to search for the truth. This is relatively simple in the natural sciences. But when public policy is involved truth is elusive, and indeed there may be as many truths as there are people. Thus when controversial material appears in *Science* it often draws an intense and varied response.

About half of such letters, while expressing a strong view, are thoughtful and carefully phrased. The other letters give evidence of being written in anger and in haste. They may contain intemperate remarks, libelous personal attacks, and speculative attribution of evil motivations to others. Publication of some of the material we receive would be a disservice to readers, to writers, and to the magazine.

Each year we receive about 2000 letters and have space to publish less than a fourth of them. In making choices among letters commenting on policy issues, we are guided by some principles. Individuals who feel they have been unfairly treated or misrepresented in *Science* should have an opportunity to express their views. Others, whose perspective differs from that of an author, may feel that an injustice has been done and their thoughts are carefully considered. Since we cannot publish all good letters we must make choices, in which editorial considerations have a role. For example:

1) The shorter and more concise the letter, the greater the chance that it will be selected for publication.

2) Letters should be understandable to all readers of *Science*, with disciplinary jargon avoided.

3) The selection of letters reflects the range of opinions received by the editor. While it is felt that letters from well-known scientists and public figures may especially interest the reader, all letters are given serious consideration.

Letters are edited for style, internal consistency, accurate representation of the article being commented on, and factual and grammatical correctness. Editing of letters is discussed with the letter writer and changes are made with the knowledge and approval of the writer.

The staff of *Science* is grateful for all the letters we receive, even those that are intemperate. After all, there is a fate worse than being criticized. That is, to get no letters at all.—PHILIP H. ABELSON and CHRISTINE KARLIK