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An Editor's Quest (II)

There is a story that a patient was asked by a psychiatrist, "Do you have trouble making decisions?" The patient answered, "Yes and no." *Science* has a similar problem in regard to its research reports. For every 100 that we receive, we can publish no more than 20 if we are to remain the slim, chic, and portable journal that you see today. Yet most of the manuscripts describe competent studies, well worthy of being published. How will we choose? We will try to select the manuscripts that are most appropriate for an interdisciplinary journal whose readers want to be exposed to the very best in each field. To achieve that goal *Science* is introducing procedures that should result in decisions that are both better and more rapid.

Each week all manuscripts will go out to a member of our newly appointed Board of Reviewing Editors, some of whom are listed on the masthead. The reviewing editor will make an initial appraisal of a paper in terms of interest, quality, relevance to major problems, and so on and give it a rating on a scale from 10 to 1. On the basis of these ratings, the editorial staff will return 60 percent of the manuscripts to the authors within 10 days and send the remaining manuscripts out for further review. It is our intention eventually that all manuscripts will either be returned to their authors within approximately 2 weeks—so that the papers may be submitted elsewhere—or will continue in the reviewing process. Manuscripts that receive top ratings from the reviewing board will have a 50 percent chance of being accepted. As a result of the decrease in the number of manuscripts under consideration, we should become more efficient in the second phase of the reviewing process also. Because of the diversity of *Science* authors, there will be some exceptional cases in which there is no member of the reviewing board with the appropriate expertise. In such cases the editorial staff will select reviewers to make the initial appraisal.

In essence, this selection process is similar to peer review of research grants awarded on a priority score. Manuscripts will be evaluated in relation to others, not on the basis of an absolute standard. The line between the accepted and the not-accepted will involve the same terrible "yes and no" factors that the grant administrator with insufficient funds must face. To some extent the new procedures will increase our work load since we expect, by streamlining the review process, to get ever better manuscripts, and this will make the decisions increasingly difficult. Yet we believe that these changes will make a more exciting journal.

One rule must accompany these changes—no resubmissions. Each author of a returned manuscript can explain to his or her graduate students that "unfortunately we chose the week in which Darwin, Newton, Priestley, and Keynes submitted their own seminal discoveries." That not only will teach graduate students how statistical fluctuations run the world but will help us give this system a chance to function. A second rule is a must—there will be no lobbying or phoning of review board members to influence their decisions. These individuals were chosen for their Solomonic wisdom, their mercurial response times, and their encyclopedic knowledge, qualities achieved by being exceedingly busy scientists.

The final reviewing board will be composed of 40 members whose fields will cover the areas in which *Science* receives the most manuscripts. Half are listed in this issue, and the others will be listed in a subsequent issue. Their judgments will determine the success of this experiment, and *Science* is deeply indebted to them for their willingness to participate.—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.