

## Why Does It Take So Long?

It hardly seems possible that this issue marks the beginning of the sixth year of publication of *The International Journal of Prosthodontics*. Although we have made numerous changes over the past 5 years, we have endeavored to hold to our initial premise that it is important to print news not history and keep publication delays to the minimum. Even though we average approximately 7 months between submission and publication, authors and readers often question why publication takes so long. This is not entirely an internally controlled issue. Sometimes the author's inattention to the Journal's requirements necessitates photocopying or even printing of slides to make it possible to forward them for review. This is a delay that we try to minimize by assuming the task, rather than returning the paper to enforce compliance to guidelines. Sometimes the selected reviewers are unable to expeditiously review a paper, resulting in other delays. However, I must say that our reviewers have generally exceeded my expectations for timely processing as well as making discerning reviews. The forwarding editors likewise have been very prompt in coalescing the thoughts of the reviewers to write their reports and in sending them to our office. Sometimes, in addition to the consistent policy of review by two independent evaluators and statistical review when indicated, a technical paper may need to be also sent to an external authority, such as a physicist, chemist, or mathematician. On occasions, a paper is submitted to two additional reviewers for broader opinions. This also takes time.

Upon receiving the report of the reviewers, the Editor-in-Chief must decide on the merit of publication. Often this is not a clear-cut decision, because reviewers may disagree or may recommend publication only if certain questions are satisfactorily answered or issues are clarified. Each manuscript that potentially merits publication is then edited to incorporate the reviewers' changes and to make needed alterations to syntax, terminology, or form. It is a matter of policy to ensure that there is a measure of consistency in word use, in accordance with the definitions of *The Glossary of Prosthodontic Terms*. Also, acceptable form is required to provide the reader with a measure of comfort and familiarity with the way papers are presented. Although Dr Tacker addressed the components of a paper in her series of *Journal* articles<sup>1-7</sup> many writers still fail to heed her advice and submit manuscripts that require restructuring.

All of us must read a large number of articles, especially those of us in academe. I have found that a consistent structure allows one to quickly use the skeleton of a paper to understand its message, ascertain whether it is of great enough interest to read further, and facilitate comprehension of the in-depth pursuit. When such structure is lacking, quick review is more difficult. I prefer to read the abstract, the purpose statement, and the conclusions. If there is clarity and cohesiveness among these three elements, the paper is usually well constructed and presented. If a purpose statement is lacking, or is poorly defined, the intent of the paper is not easily discernible.

After being edited, all papers are returned to the author for approval or for response to the editors' comments and questions. To facilitate the author's response, all manuscripts are entered into a computer, and all editing is done within the body of the paper, not by use of marginal notes. In my own writing, I have always found marginal comments disruptive to the fluidity of reading and often difficult to respond to or implement. Thus, to avoid such handwritten insertions, all papers are literally rewritten and editorial comments are appended.

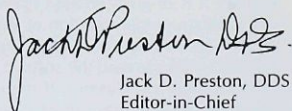
It is the period between the return of a paper to its author and the correction and resubmission that often consumes the greatest amount of time. This may be because authors feel that a paper is finished when it is submitted and the project is mentally terminated when the manuscript is mailed. Apparently the inertia that follows initial submission is not as easily overcome by some authors as others. Certainly, the pain of revision can be greater than that of initial writing. Sometimes, to make a paper acceptable, statistical revision may be needed or additional data must be gathered, thus extending the period of revision. Whatever the reason, an author's delay in returning a paper may be the greatest deterrent to expeditious publication.

When the manuscript is returned, the corrections and additions must be entered, and the paper must be re-evaluated. If the author's response is incomplete or inadequate it must again be returned to that author. After the manuscript is finally accepted and forwarded for publication, the publisher must prepare the illustrations for printing, read the manuscripts once again to intercept any remaining errors, and prepare them for galley proofs. Proof copies are submitted to authors, and final changes are made and once again reviewed

by the Editor-in-Chief. Printing and mailing consume the final amount of time in the lapse between submission and receipt by the reader.

One delay that we continue to endeavor to avoid is that of dealing with a backlog of manuscripts. This requires some strictness in the acceptance of papers, and the adjustment of the rejection rate is the only way to avoid the accrual of manuscripts.

The *International Journal of Prosthodontics* endeavors to present manuscripts of contemporary value; although delays are inevitable, we do try to minimize them. We appreciate the support of both our authors and subscribers and will always try to recall the reasons for publishing a specialty journal—to disseminate needed information and to document the advances of our profession and our specialty.



Jack D. Preston, DDS  
Editor-in-Chief

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