

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

From Submission to Publication—How Long?

The history of a manuscript considered for publication in JAM probably begins most logically at that ill-defined moment when the author decides the results of his work do indeed warrant formal communication to his colleagues around the world. He has generally discussed this decision with others, and frequently has tried his ideas and results in the forum of a scientific meeting (partly for communication to the audience, partly to determine their reactions). But, in a greater or lesser degree, all of the considerations of significance, completeness and relevance have been weighed by the author, and the products of his ingenuity and efforts are embodied in a scientific paper.

Following his primary concern, "Will this be accepted for publication?" the question uppermost in the mind of the author as he mails his manuscript is probably, "How soon will I see it in print?" We can answer this with a rather vague, "As soon as is humanly possible," but with present procedures for logging, reviewing, revising, editing and printing manuscripts, there is no simple, single answer. The greatest variability in elapsed time between the receipt of a manuscript and its publication in JAM occurs during the editorial processes which culminate in the decision as to whether or not the manuscript is acceptable. Beyond this, the elapsed time from acceptance to publication is fixed by the time period between issues and by the current backlog of accepted manuscripts. Therefore, the best guide to "How long?" is the past performance record of the editorial office.

Fig. 1 shows the "track record" of the present editorial office of JAM for the 145 manuscripts on which final decisions were made. Readily acceptable manuscripts have been processed with a modal elapsed time of 6-7 weeks. Manuscripts which were acceptable after relatively minor revision have required an elapsed modal time of 8-9 weeks. Readily rejectable papers have moved through the process at very nearly the same pace as readily acceptable ones. These are relatively straightforward cases.

The secondary modes of the "accepted after revision" and "rejected" distributions betray the more difficult problems. Both represent two factors: 1) author delays in revising manuscripts (a relatively minor number of cases and hardly perpetrated by authors who *do* wonder how long it will take to get into print; and 2) strong disagreements between the author and the reviewers, with attendant prolonged debates, multiple revisions, and finally, difficult decisions. Since these latter debates are almost always on substantive issues, there is no inclination to suppress them. But they do take time.

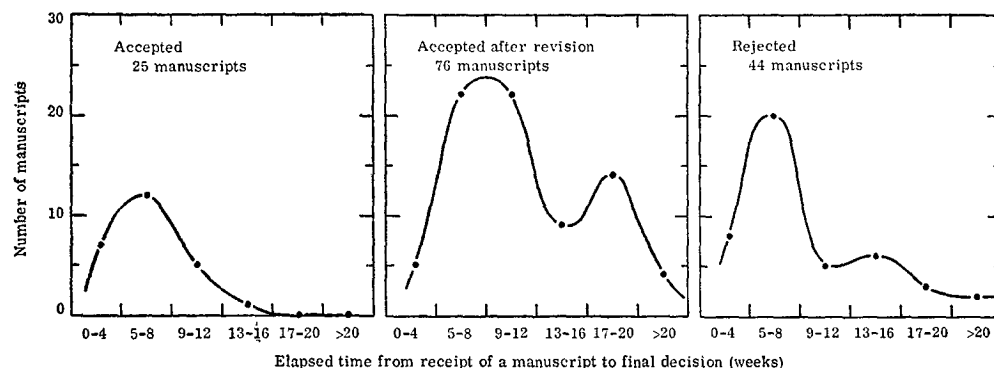


FIG. 1. Distribution of elapsed time between receipt of a manuscript and the editorial decision to accept or reject it.

Although the experiences summarized in Fig. 1 represent only the initial performance of the present editorial office of JAM, they do provide the following guidelines to authors who wish to publish their papers in this JOURNAL:

- 1) If your paper reports clearly on significant ideas and results which are not too controversial, you can expect to see it in print 4–6 months after submission.
- 2) If your paper contains significant information but is poorly written (clarity is particularly important), is unnecessarily long, or if it contains minor technical errors, add 2–3 weeks to the normal review time.
- 3) If your paper presents ideas and results which are worthy but noticeably incomplete or highly controversial, the printed version will probably appear 8–10 months after your initial submission.

In both of these latter circumstances, add on any time you wish to spend thinking about revisions, beyond the 2–3 weeks which are normally required for revisions.

Glenn R. Hilst, EDITOR