

EDITORIAL

As I assume the Chief Editorship of the *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences (JAS)*, I am conscious of the great responsibility that now falls upon me. *JAS* is devoted to publishing research on the fundamental physics, dynamics, and chemistry of the atmospheric sciences, and as such represents something of a “cornerstone” within the AMS suite of journals. Its reputation for excellence has always been very high. In order to maintain this reputation, I believe that *JAS* has to focus on what it is best at, namely, its emphasis on quantitative and deductive studies grounded in the fundamentals of our subject, and that it has to maintain rigorous standards of editing and reviewing.

I believe that the single most serious issue facing *JAS* at the present time is the length of time it takes to publish a paper. I have experienced this problem myself as an author in recent years, and many colleagues have expressed their frustration with what they regard as unnecessary delays. Clearly this is a problem that threatens the preeminent status of *JAS* and needs to be fixed. There are several aspects.

The first aspect is the technical production. This is an AMS-wide problem. The mean production time for *JAS*, namely, the time from receipt of an accepted manuscript by the AMS technical editorial staff to its publication, was approximately 255 days in 1999. This is much too long. As explained by AMS Executive Director Ronald D. McPherson (*Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, April 2000, 842–843), the AMS has taken some concerted measures to rectify this problem and to reduce the mean production time to 150 days. With the addition of new staff, production times have started to decrease. Although some journals have production times that are less than 150 days, the length of time required by AMS journals partly reflects the need to produce a high quality Web version, which does not allow for author typesetting with LaTeX.

The second aspect is the review process. For *JAS*, in 1999 the mean time for a first review decision was about 20 weeks, with significant variations between editors. This is exclusive of the time taken for the paper to reach the field editor and is clearly too long. I refer you to the editorial by the Publications Commissioner concerning this issue, which appeared in the January/February 1999 issues of all AMS journals. By following the procedures listed there, it is intended that the mean time for a first review decision can be reduced to 10 weeks. To achieve this goal requires diligence on the part of the editors and loyalty on the part of reviewers. I believe that editors acquire the loyalty of reviewers by treating them with respect: by providing them with feedback and by sticking to their recommendations to maintain the quality of the journal. An excellent journal wins the respect of authors and reviewers alike. A Web-based tracking system for all AMS journal submissions has recently been introduced and should help to keep track of the progress of manuscripts and identify editors that are unacceptably slow in reaching decisions.

The third aspect is the time taken to get a submitted paper in the hands of the field editor. We have considered whether it might be appropriate for *JAS* to move toward a *Journal of Physical Oceanography*-style system where manuscripts are submitted directly to the relevant editor. However, this system has its drawbacks, particularly the uneven load between editors that can develop. I will monitor this problem carefully and if necessary we will reconsider this option. As we move toward Web-based submission this problem should become much less of an issue.

I would like to welcome our newest Editor, Dr. Wei-Kuo Tao of NASA Goddard Space Flight Center to the team. And I would most particularly like to thank the outgoing chief editors, William Cotton and Roger Pielke Sr., for their many years of editorial service to *JAS*. They have maintained the high standards that we all expect of *JAS*, and I can only hope to do so well myself.

Ted Shepherd
Chief Editor