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Administrative Committee Report: Committee on Publication Policy

The Committee on Public Policy is charged with reviewing and suggesting changes in the policy, contents, and format of the Journal and other Society publications, but excluding the ASA books program and Standards, for consideration by the Editor-in-Chief and the Executive Council and proposing new publications.

Introduction

Among many other tasks, scientists and engineers write proposals and reports, read related literature, learn new approaches and techniques, and attend meetings and conferences. (And, hopefully, somehow find time to actually undertake research!) In the end, these many activities do not matter unless research findings are published for posterity. Papers in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings, such as *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (JASA)*, *JASA Express Letters (JASA-EL)*, *Acoustics Today*, and *Proceedings of Meetings on Acoustics (POMA)* are our final products toward which our other activities are generally channeled.

Publication involves two main steps: writing a paper and getting it through the publication process. As its name would suggest, the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) Committee on Publication Policy (PP) discusses policy issues impacting both steps of this process. On the basis of these discussions, the PP provides independent advice to the ASA Publications Office, editor in chief, Executive Council, and a forum through which the ASA membership can make suggestions and raise issues and concerns.

The importance of writing clear and thorough research papers can hardly be overstated. Over the centuries, scientists have tailored writing conventions to present their research results effectively. This style is known as *scholarly* (or *academic*) *writing*. Scholarly writing is quite different now than in the nineteenth century and will likely continue to evolve. The stylistic conventions of *JASA* are described in the Information for Contributors at bit.ly/2ph0qZK. Scholarly writing practices also adhere to ethical principles. The ethical principles of the ASA can be found at acousticalsociety.org/ethical-principles.

Publishing research papers is an involved process. For ASA publications, authors submit their original and revised manuscripts, rebuttal letters, and supplemental materials via the online Editorial Manager (EM). In addition to keeping the EM and review process running smoothly, the editor in chief and the ASA Publications Office appoint associate editors (AEs), archive the ASA publications, write instructions for submitting papers, manage online handling of manuscripts, and maintain a database of reviewers. The Publications Office also works with American Institute of Physics (AIP) Publishing to get papers published. In recent decades, the publication process has been changing rapidly. Not long ago, all communications with the Publications Office were handled via postal mail, and all members received *JASA* in print form.

Currently, the Publications Office is a *virtual* office, with staff spread out across the country.

All issues pertinent to scholarly writing and the publication process are discussed at meetings of the PP. The committee is composed of the chair,¹ 12 members, the editor in chief, and the ASA president-elect. Because different areas of acoustics have somewhat differing styles for scholarly writing and presenting research results, the members are selected from the entire spectrum of the ASA technical committees. The PP meets twice yearly during regularly scheduled ASA meetings. The PP also invites guests, such as the editors of *JASA-EL*, *Acoustics Today*, and *POMA*, as well as representatives from the ASA Publications Office, AIP Publishing, and ASA Student Council to participate in the discussions. In total, about 25 people with different backgrounds typically participate in the committee meetings, which enables consideration of every topic from various perspectives.

Examples of Recent Topics

The PP has a website (see asapublicationpolicy.org) that provides background information and archives past meetings topics. To clarify the scope of the PP, we present some topics that have been discussed during the past several years.

Ethical Principles

All manuscripts and abstracts submitted to ASA journals must adhere to the ASA Ethical Principles. These principles state, among other things, that research involving human subjects and animals should be done according to an existing governing authority, authorship should be limited to those who actually contributed to a publication, errors in published data should be corrected, and any potential or perceived conflict of interest should be disclosed. The ASA ethical principles were approved by the ASA Executive Council in 2004. Because some parts of the current ethical principles are less detailed than those in other societies and would benefit from clarification, the Publications Office and PP decided recently to update and extend the ASA Ethical Principles. The PP has been working on a draft revision of the ASA Ethical Principles.

Plagiarism and Text Recycling

Another timely topic being discussed by the PP is plagiarism, including self-plagiarism and text recycling. Plagiarism,

which is a serious form of research misconduct, is facilitated by modern technology. An example of self-plagiarism would be when an author repeats (or “recycles”) extended portions of their own previous text without proper citation and quotation marks. Such a practice may be regarded as an unethical attempt to receive credit for multiple publications based on the same work or it may violate copyrights of prior publications. The ASA Publications Office employs software, called Similarity Check/iThenticate (see ithenticate.com), that enables automatic detection of most plagiarism and text recycling. The software identifies potential articles of concern and calculates the degree of overlap. The PP is working on recommendations for implementing this software to check new submissions and to advise on best practices for preventing plagiarism and text recycling.

What Is a Prior Publication?

Related to the issue of text recycling, one might ask what constitutes prior publication. This is not a trivial question to answer. There is a consensus that papers in peer-reviewed journals, chapters in books, and books *are* prior publications. But what about publications such as PhD theses, preprints in arXiv, proposals, reports, and noncopyrighted papers in conference proceedings? Can the text from these publications be partially or fully recycled? (The ASA allows *POMA* publications, for example, to be revised into publications for *JASA*.) The PP has been considering this topic. The recommendations will be reflected in updated *JASA* policy statements and instructions.

Updates from American Institute of Physics Publishing

Most meetings of the PP include an update from AIP Publishing, which oversees the publication of ASA journals. These updates are very important because the process of publishing ASA journals is a collaborative effort between the ASA Publications Office and AIP Publishing.

Simplifying the Submission Process

Currently, two versions of a manuscript must be submitted to *JASA* and *JASA-EL*: one with figures embedded and the other with figures collected at the end. It would, of course, be easier for authors, AEs, and reviewers to deal with only one version of a manuscript with the figures embedded. The PP initiated discussions with AIP Publishing to determine whether a manuscript with figures embedded can be used in production. If implemented, this would make a submission process easier.

¹Vladimir Ostashev has chaired the Committee on Publication Policy since 2018. Keith Wilson chaired the Committee from 2012 to 2018.

Journal of the Acoustical Society of America Letters to the Editor

Some AEs have questioned whether it is necessary for *JASA* to have its own Letters to the Editor section, given the existence of *JASA-EL*. The PP discussed this issue and noted that *JASA* Letters to the Editor and *JASA-EL* have different guidelines. The former can be used for commentary on previously published *JASA* and *JASA-EL* articles and reviews. The PP recommended unanimously to keep *JASA* Letters to the Editor.

Impact Factor

The two-year impact factor (IF) has become an increasingly prevalent metric for assessing journal quality. *JASA* recognizes the importance of the IF, and strategies for increasing it have been a frequent topic for the PP. The committee has also discussed how other metrics might be more appropriate for an acoustics journal such as *JASA*, primarily because acoustics is a relatively small field with a large time constant for papers. *JASA* performs very well on metrics such as a five-year IF, cited half-life, Eigenfactor Score, and Article Influence Score. An outcome of these discussions is that the metrics are now posted to a web page (see asa.scitation.org/jas/info/about).

Conflicts of Interest

The PP considered conflicts of interest involving AEs and reviewers. In particular, how do we address situations involving AEs and reviewers who know the authors of papers they are handling? It was argued that, given the smallness of the community, such situations may be difficult to avoid. There was support for allowing AEs and reviewers to manage potential conflicts.

Plan S

The European initiative called “Plan S” is planned for implementation by 13 national research funding organizations, starting in 2021. At this time, all research supported by public grants must be published in open-access journals. The journal of the European Acoustics Association, *Acta Acustica united with Acustica*, became a full open-access journal as of January 1, 2020. If the Plan S initiative gains momentum, it could have a substantial impact on *JASA*, which is not considered compliant. Plan S is regarded by many scientists as having major drawbacks, as described, for example, in the article by Lohse and Meiburg in *Physics Today* (2019; see doi.org/10.1063/PT.3.4259). In particular, the pay-to-publish approach underlying Plan S may adversely

impact the quality and cost of scholarly journals. The PP has discussed the implications of Plan S for ASA publications.

Concluding Remarks

The PP endeavors to maintain and improve the high standards of scholarly writing and publication quality for which the ASA journals are known. It incorporates the experience and knowledge of many people with varying backgrounds who have been authors, reviewers, editors, and publishers. Any member of the ASA is welcome to contribute to this process, and the committee greatly values your input. If you have suggestions for PP discussion topics, please reach out to a committee member. Suggestions can also be uploaded at asapublicationpolicy.org/meeting-topics.

References

Lohse, D., and Meiburg, E. (2019) Commentary: On the quality and costs of science publication. *Physics Today* 72(8), 10.

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