

## Editorial

### Criteria for manuscript acceptance

Over the past 10 years, manuscript submissions to *The Journal of Experimental Biology* (JEB) have risen from ~500 per year to almost 1000. Within the first six months of 2007, we have already received over 600 manuscripts and will, in all likelihood, break the 1000 submissions barrier for the first time this year. This is basically good news, as it shows that JEB is an attractive place to publish. However, there are also downsides to this development. The greatly increased number of submissions is obviously increasing the workload on administrative staff, editors and reviewers. In order to control production costs, the annual page allocation in JEB is fixed, and therefore to keep within the space constraints of the journal we must reject more of the submitted manuscripts. Ten years ago, our rejection rate was less than 40% of submitted manuscripts; it is now more than 60%.

This steep increase in rejection rates has created lively discussions at JEB Editors' Meetings, as we have strived to find ways of maximizing the use of available space and defining criteria for manuscript acceptance. One unanimous decision was that the current range of subject areas should be maintained. This means that JEB will continue to cover all aspects of animal physiology, although with an increased emphasis on aspects that are more generally relevant to most 'comparative physiologists'. We also wish to feature work employing molecular techniques for investigating physiological phenomena of interest. To help us monitor the spread of scientific fields across the journal, we have introduced a list of 'subject categories' for the author to choose from at submission. It has also been decided that JEB should focus specifically on hypothesis-driven research, i.e. research aimed at elucidating novel physiological mechanisms rather than descriptive or theoretical studies. The Editors are reluctant to introduce a maximum length for manuscripts, as stipulated by some other journals. However, manuscript size is scrutinized and we urge reviewers to check that manuscripts are no longer than necessary.

Rejection rates of >60% of the submitted manuscripts have introduced a number of problems. The most obvious is that we now have to reject manuscripts that have received positive

reviews. In many of these cases, studies have been well carried out but do not lead to particularly exciting or novel results. This is something that is difficult to convey to authors, as the crucial information is usually contained in the comments only seen by the Editors as well as being reflected in a low-priority ranking of the manuscript by the reviewers. Moreover, it is self-evident that we all perceive our own work to be of special interest, being aware of all specific problems and questions relating to our closest field of scientific concern. We are also aware that the necessity of having to reject 'sound' manuscripts introduces a measure of arbitrariness into the editorial process. This starts with the selection of reviewers. We usually select at least one reviewer proposed by the author and do generally respect any requests from authors to exclude particular individuals from the reviewing process. It is sometimes surprising that the most scornful verdicts are from people proposed by the authors themselves! We do rely on a solid core of reviewers that we know well and that have supplied us with insightful judgment on manuscripts in the past. These reviewers are one of the most valuable resources of JEB, as they guarantee the quality of the research published in the Journal. In all cases, Editors are free to make the final decision on whether to accept or reject a particular manuscript, and in areas of doubt we have a system whereby more than one Editor is involved in taking that final decision.

The steep rise in rejection rates on JEB over the past few years has aggravated many authors who have seen manuscripts rejected that would have been accepted a few years earlier. It has also been a challenge to Editors and reviewers, who face the task of selecting the most promising manuscripts from an increasing number of excellent articles submitted to the Journal. Maintaining the balance between the many fields that JEB has covered successfully in the past and attracting good manuscripts from the emerging field of 'molecular physiology' is the major challenge to JEB in the future.

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