Editorial

Jack D. Gaskill, Editor

The Review Process

I suppose it is rather obvious that without authors there would be no journal to publish, and without readers there would be no need to publish it. What is perhaps less obvious is that without a solid corps of qualified referees as well, it would be highly unlikely that a journal of high quality could be published at all. Because of the importance of the review process, I have chosen it as the subject for this editorial column.

The selection of referees is the first action an editor must take after receiving a manuscript, and it is also the most important. The ideal referee is highly knowledgeable in the specific area of the paper, has no significant conflict of interest regarding the paper, and is able to provide an objective and constructive review of it. In addition, this ideal person is willing to serve and will do so in a professional and timely fashion. Referees are selected for _Optical Engineering_ as follows: I first identify several potential reviewers for each manuscript that I receive, and Martha Stockton, my Associate Editor, then contacts as many of these individuals as necessary in order to obtain two who are as nearly ideal as possible.

I know from personal experience that many individuals dread being asked to review a technical paper only slightly less than they dread getting an audit notice from the Internal Revenue Service. I also know that there are individuals who welcome requests to serve as a referee as long as they don't get too many. In any event, a good review takes time, and time is a scarce commodity for most people. Consequently, I make the following pledge: I will try to refrain from asking anyone to review more than one manuscript per year, and I will attempt to make the reviewing process as simple and as painless as possible.

As an author, you can help keep the level of pain associated with the reviewing process to a minimum by adhering to a few basic rules. To begin with, you should follow the instructions outlined in "Information for Contributors to _Optical Engineering_" on the page preceding this editorial. In addition, you should be able to answer yes to each of the following questions. Does this paper make a contribution to the field? Is it well organized? It is easy to read? Are you proud of it? Will the figures reproduce well? If asked to serve as a referee for your own paper, would you find it to be a reasonably painless task? Would you be able to give it a good review? If the answer to any of these questions is no, I would suggest that you revise the manuscript before submitting it; don't expect more from another reviewer than you would expect from yourself.

One last request—let me know if you would like to serve as a referee for _Optical Engineering_, and please indicate the areas in which you feel qualified to do so.