

## Editorial

# The reasons behind 'Instructions to Authors'



Preparing your work for publishing in a journal is both exciting and hopefully a labor of love. As the authors decide on the journal that they wish to have consider their

work, formatting and style become relevant. The philosophy of a journal's 'Instructions to Authors' and how seriously authors adhere to these is the subject of this issue's editorial.

Recently our editorial staff completed major revisions to the JMATE 'Instructions to Authors' and this issue is the first following these new policies. The purpose of 'Instructions to Authors' and their usefulness to both authors and editorial staff cannot be understated. Obviously, right at the outset it stands to reason that the more these instructions are followed at the front end, the less work and frustration for all concerned as the article proceeds to galley-proof stage. This is especially true for JMATE as we do not charge to review or process manuscripts. This is made possible by our devoted and hardworking volunteer staff and reviewers. These volunteers have made a commitment to upholding JMATE to the highest professional standards, as reflected in the 'Instructions to Authors'. For certain authors some requirements may seem unnecessary but the reality is that every instruction listed is a result of difficulties experienced by our staff over the more than 5 years of publishing JMATE.

The editorial staff are always working to assist you, the authors, to ensure the work is presented in the clearest and best light. For example, due to restrictions in column size, we have limited the number of panels per figure to ensure clarity and avoid loss of detail that would happen with too many panels in one figure. Maps, photographs or tables that have regular sized

writing, once photo-reduced to fit the columns in the journal, will often become unreadable. We always advise authors to exaggerate any writing or key diagrammatic details by using color, larger font or bold-type to make sure these are not lost.

The other aspect of an article that is often given less attention by authors is the reference section. The purpose of references is to substantiate statements within the manuscript that were not proven by the work - usually found in the introduction or discussion. Ultimately the use of references provides the confirmation of stated facts and allows the reader a source to go to if they wish to follow-up. In many cases the statement made can be confirmed by numerous articles written over the years, leading to the question "how many references should be used to substantiate a fact?" Does one just list every article that can be found? From the journal's perspective one has to ask whether this serves the readership or does it add to the confusion? Perhaps a more useful approach would be to use the most current and relevant of the many available references to back up statements in the manuscript. This selection is best done by the authors who have become familiar with the literature. So to encourage this approach, journals are putting limits on the number of references allowed, encouraging authors to select those that are the most relevant and appropriate. Journal editors hope that restricting numbers of references to those that the authors consider 'key' will result in a paper that is more succinct and easy to follow. The other critical aspect to references is they must be accessible to the reader, otherwise their use is of no help. To that end, the use of 'personal communications', 'unpublished data', 'presented at' and 'submitted papers' do not fulfill those criteria. The rule of thumb for these is if that information is critical to the paper, include it as part of the original manuscript.

Finally when a journal actually indicates a willingness to publish the submitted work with a



## **Editorial Cont'd**

'conditional acceptance pending revisions' notification, this requires immediate attention. Once an editor decides to accept a paper, immediate plans are made how to fit it into the next issue, on the assumption that authors are dedicated to ensuring that their paper does go to press as quickly as possible. All journals work on deadlines and delays on the part of the authors could jeopardize the status of their manuscript or cause undue stress to the editorial staff trying to meet deadlines for publication. If the corresponding author is away for an extended period of time, they should assign another of the authors to handle any issues that could arise during their absence. This would guarantee continued progress to getting the manuscript prepared for publication in a timely fashion.

There is no doubt that no matter whether you are a first time author or seasoned veteran of the publishing game, everyone enjoys the satisfaction of getting one's work accepted as a manuscript in a peer reviewed journal. Help make this a pleasant experience by following the 'Instructions to Authors' prepared by the journal to which you are submitting your work. Your work will be published quicker and editors everywhere will thank you.

Dr Carin Wittnich  
Editor-in-Chief, JMATE