

The Editorship of *IOVS*: A Fiendish Job!

Some years ago, when he became Editor in Chief of *Science*, Philip Abelson wrote a rather facetious editorial in which he described how he would each morning admire his dashing figure in the mirror and consider what dramatic changes he could effect in the journal in his powerful new position. Since I became Editor of *IOVS*, I, too, have observed a change when I study my appearance in the mirror each day (Fig. 1). As I morosely ponder my Mephistophelean transformation, it occurs to me that there are several likely causes. First, in addition to the good news that biomedical journal editors bring to authors of manuscripts that are accepted, there are the unfortunately much more frequent letters to unhappy authors whose work has been rejected. In the past, *IOVS* has accepted for publication (most often after one or more revisions) approximately 40% of submitted manuscripts. Since I assumed the editorial duties for the journal in June 2002, our rejection rate has been running substantially higher because our large backlog of accepted manuscripts would lead to an unacceptable delay between acceptance and publication. We hope that our decreased acceptance rate will be only temporary, until our backlog shrinks. Our manuscript review policies have not changed, except that manuscripts that receive “borderline” priorities may now be rejected, rather than returned for revision. In addition – and this change is permanent – we have eliminated the previous category, “reject, but may re-submit,” in which authors of a rejected manuscript were invited to revise their work and send it back, with a cover letter describing their responses to the previous reviewers (much like a manuscript that had been returned for revision but not rejected). I believe that continuing this category unnecessarily encumbers the review process and does not really improve the chances for acceptance of borderline manuscripts. Our policy now is that all manuscripts not accepted or returned for revisions will be rejected; re-submission to *IOVS* is strongly discouraged.

Like many journals, *IOVS* assigns newly submitted manuscripts to an Editorial Board Member (EBM) with expertise in the subspecialty field of the manuscript. The EBM names potential reviewers who are asked to evaluate the work. However, unlike some journals, we do not have a “triage” process, in which the EBM is asked to make a preliminary decision as to whether a manuscript appears to be in the upper 50% of work in the field, or in the lower 50%. Manuscripts in the latter category are returned to the authors without a full review. *IOVS* will not institute this process. Although we don’t want to overburden our EBMs and reviewers, I believe that every new manuscript that is submitted to us represents a substantial investment of physical, intellectual and, indeed emotional energy on the part of its authors. Not all scientific research merits publication. But I believe that it is most important to give our potential authors the courtesy of a thorough, rapid and, hopefully, fair review with a reasonably detailed explanation of where it has failed and how it might be improved. Very rarely, we will judge a manuscript to be so deficient that a full review will not be helpful. But I emphasize that this will occur extremely rarely. Two of the three qualities that I want to emphasize for the *IOVS* manuscript review process are rigor and fairness.

The third essential quality is speed. And this is the second reason why some people, especially our EBMs and reviewers, may think that I’ve become a clone of Beelzebub. EBMs whose response to requests for review has been slow have

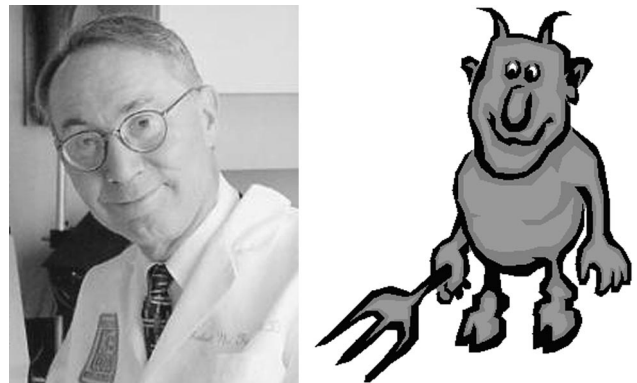


FIGURE 1. The Editor before (*left*) and after (*right*) his fiendish metamorphosis.

on occasion received prickly messages from me. Reviewers who are behind schedule get similar and repeated messages from Dave Roddy, our busy and effective review coordinator. We want to receive your review yesterday! Biomedical research is a demanding and competitive business, and those who submit the results of their research for possible publication justifiably want their work to be evaluated speedily. Since our review process went on-line June 3, 2002, our mean manuscript review—from submission of a new manuscript to first decision—has been slightly more than 39 days, the shortest in our history. That’s wonderful. But the range has been from 1 to 87 days, much too wide a spread. Reviewers and EBMs are chosen because of their continued success in the research profession. With that success should also come a sense of responsibility to others in the field, that in addition to conducting one’s own research, one has the duty to evaluate, fairly and rapidly, the work of others. Scientific journals depend for their success on the entire scientific community and not just on a limited staff. The continued success of *IOVS* depends on the continued collaboration of the entire ophthalmic and vision research community.

IOVS has grown tremendously in its approximately 40 years. Its editors have been among the most distinguished members of our profession: Bernie Becker, Herb Kaufman, Alan Laties, Steve Podos, Terry Ernest, Harry Quigley, Jerry Chader. It’s an honor and a privilege to follow in their path, to continue the great tradition they’ve established and, hopefully, to try to make this already distinguished publication even better. One of the great advantages of our on-line presence is that e-mail speeds up, indeed encourages, communication. I welcome messages from our research community: comments and suggestions, praise (that’s especially welcome!), complaints and criticism (not welcome, but sometimes necessary). Our editorial staff at the *IOVS* offices in Rockville has continued to do a superb job. They have been especially helpful to authors, EBMs, and reviewers who have difficulty with the on-line submission and review process. I’m looking forward to an exciting, but devilishly busy, next five years!

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