



### Upon Proceeding...

For those in optical science and engineering, the *Proceedings of SPIE* perform a special function in informing workers in the field. These written and referenced reports of conference presentations represent publications that are somewhere between private communications between individual researchers and peer-reviewed papers, such as those published in this journal. Because proceedings papers are not formally reviewed, they present the community with a problem: published technical reports that have not been reviewed in detail for accuracy or correctness.

There are some in the optics community who believe that those “yellow books” are an abomination and should be cast into the fires of perdition. They would not be caught dead with copies in their offices. If they do possess one, it is hidden behind a pack of committee reports, like a bottle of Old Granddad. Their students and colleagues, however, sneak off to the library to get the latest buzz in their field. What is at issue here is the tug between the need to get the latest information and the requirement that published information be as accurate as possible.

Research publications are not the only entities that face this dilemma. The electronic news organizations are pressured into producing “scoops” at the risk of accuracy. The difference is that the validation process, measured in hours for contemporary news, takes months in our field.

In the course of preparing this editorial, I looked at the “Information for Contributors” that I had revised for publication in the journal. I was dismayed to see I had not specified that *Optical Engineering* does not accept material that has been previously published. It is, I believe, common knowledge within the research community. Still, it should have been stated explicitly. In the future, it will be. On the web, a statement of this policy, written by Brian Thompson, had been posted on SPIE Web at <http://www.spie.org/web/journals/oeguidelines.html> for quite some time.

Problems with prior publication affect various segments of our community differently. For example, some in the biomedical community are reluctant to contribute to conference proceedings because some journals in the field will not accept manuscripts describing a study if there is any prior publication. The rule, understandably, is an ef-

fort to ward off multiple publications of the same work. The problem is that the policy reduces the advantage of timeliness of publication and may, to some extent, favor an “old boy network” of researchers, who circulate unpublished manuscripts among themselves.

A hybrid has been used by OSA for their topical meetings. It consists of a volume of the 4-page extended abstracts that were used to determine the content of the meeting. Since it is available at the meeting, it serves as a guide to the talks, but as a record of the event it is more enticing than revealing. Since most of the abstracts provide little in the way of results, the publication meets OSA’s guidelines for prior publication.

Prior publication will certainly be one of the issues to be addressed by the Joint Task Force on OSA/SPIE collaboration. Each society has a slightly different “take” of its definition. Still the proceedings are recognized as a useful element of SPIE’s service to optics. One of the adjectives that members of the Joint Task Force used to describe SPIE was “nimble.” By that they meant the ability to rapidly assess a new field of optics and assemble a conference to describe the results and techniques of these efforts and to give researchers in the field a place to talk to one another. The papers that are collected into a proceedings volume represent a snapshot of the field at that time and, as such, they represent an extremely valuable contribution to progress in the effort.

But it should be recognized that the quality of proceedings papers varies tremendously. Some are so self-serving and self-referential that they are nearly useless; others are nothing more than extended advertisements; a few are wrong. Any of these can be omitted from publication in the final volume by the conference chair, who also serves as the volume editor. But in the main, the proceedings papers tend to be readable reports of work in progress. And some reports, perhaps the most valuable, represent insights that would otherwise never leave the development lab. These “Reports from the Back Room” are written by engineers who will never publish anything further on the subject and we are lucky to get that!

But others are inclined to publish further. The problem is that a few are either lazy or devious. This problem arrives on our doorstep in the form of a proceedings paper submitted directly to *Optical Engineering* with no modi-

fications. The new editorial board is aware of this possibility. During the first three months we have already had to deal with two such submissions. As part of our approval chain, there is a specific item in the decision list that indicates that a paper was declined because of prior publication.

That may take care of our problem, but what about the author of a proceedings paper who would like to submit to this journal? Will their submission be rejected out of hand? The answer lies in the difference between proceedings and journal papers, which are intended as two distinct methods of research communication. As Brian Thompson pointed out in his set of guidelines (full text given below):

The Proceedings provide a vehicle for rapid reporting of ideas, techniques, and results to the optical engineering community. These reports may be somewhat incomplete, unpolished, and even somewhat inconclusive. The journal, however, is in-

tended to be archival, and papers published therein are expected to be more complete and polished than proceedings papers, to contain comparisons of theoretical and experimental results, and to include references to other work, substantial conclusions, and suggestions for future research, etc.

Therefore, an author should submit research that has been described in a proceedings volume to *Optical Engineering* only after it has been revised, expanded, and updated to reflect this difference in purpose between the two types of publications. Those who seek to convert their proceeding papers into a journal paper must take the time to turn a work for the moment into one for the ages.

**Donald C. O'Shea**  
Editor

## Guidelines for Submission of SPIE Proceedings Papers to Optical Engineering

*Optical Engineering* publishes refereed technical papers relating to the engineering, design, production, and application of optical, electro-optical, and optoelectronic components and systems.

The Editor of *Optical Engineering* and the Society, as well as the readers of the journal, recognize that there is a considerable amount of material available in the SPIE Proceedings that would make a valuable contribution to the archival refereed literature. Thus, we encourage conference chairs to select appropriate papers from their conferences and to urge the authors of these papers to prepare a manuscript suitable for consideration for inclusion in *Optical Engineering*. The Editor will often ask the conference chair to act as one of the referees. We also encourage authors, on their own initiative, to consider re-writing their papers for submission to *Optical Engineering*. The proceedings and the journal serve quite different purposes.

Authors who are interested in having their work considered for publication in *Optical Engineering* should follow the criteria and guidelines explained below.

1. Distinction between proceedings and journal papers: The proceedings provide a vehicle for rapid reporting of ideas, techniques, and results to the optical engineering community. These reports may be somewhat incomplete, unpolished, and even somewhat inconclusive. It is generally understood that their purpose is to provide snapshots of recent or continuing work and that they are not intended or required to be archival in nature. The journal, however, is intended to be archival, and papers published therein are expected to be more complete and polished than proceedings papers, to contain comparisons of theoretical and experimental results, and to include references to other work, substantial conclusions, suggestions for future research, etc.

2. Revision of proceedings manuscripts for journal submission: Proceedings manuscripts submitted to *Optical Engineering* should be substantively revised, expanded, and updated to reflect this difference in purpose between the two types of publications.

3. Journal submission format: All manuscripts submitted to *Optical Engineering* must be prepared according to the guidelines outlined in the "Information for Contributors" printed in each issue. (Copies of these instructions are also available from the Managing Editor, P.O. Box 10, Bellingham, WA 98227-0010; 360/676-3290; fax 360/647-1445; E-mail: journals@spie.org.) Of course, photocopies of proceedings manuscripts are not acceptable for submission to *Optical Engineering*.

To submit revised, expanded proceedings manuscripts to *Optical Engineering*, send one original and two photocopies of the manuscript and one original and two photocopies of each illustration to

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Do not send original, camera-ready proceedings papers intended for publication in a proceedings to *Optical Engineering*. Send only the revised, expanded manuscripts. The revised manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines set forth in the "Information for Contributors" that appears at the end of each issue of *Optical Engineering*. Authors should reference their SPIE Proceedings paper when submitting a revised version to the journal.

Manuscripts will be refereed and authors notified of the reviewers' comments as quickly as practicable. It is the Editor's hope that the approach to proceedings submissions explained above will expedite the review process for journal submissions as well as encourage authors to update, revise, expand, and polish, as appropriate, the papers they submit to *Optical Engineering*.