
EDITORIAL



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Editor

Are We Communicating?

Have you ever wondered whether you were really communicating with anyone? As an editor, I have plenty of times when I wonder. Let me take an example.

In the peer review process, I get reviews from my referees, which I then need to send back to the authors. The idea, of course, is to assure that the published form of the paper is clear, concise, and correct. The referees are chosen for their expertise in the topic covered by the paper, so it should follow that if they have questions about the manuscript, then most readers of the journal will probably also find it unclear. If I have communicated that message to the authors, then why do I occasionally get responses in which the authors go to considerable lengths to explain why the referees should have understood the manuscript, even offering lengthy additional explanations, but without corresponding revisions in the manuscript? Clearly, I failed to communicate.

Take these editorials. Does anyone read them? Occasionally, I find that someone does. As an example, several authors picked up the comment in my previous editorial about the possibility of storing digital images from their papers on an anonymous ftp site so that readers who wish to could retrieve them and examine the digital form. But I still believe, as it probably should be, that more people read the technical articles than read the editorials.

Perhaps I am a victim of my own journal's reason for existence. My editorials are plain text, usually delivered to the managing editor by e-mail as ASCII text. Yet, we argue that it is better to communicate by using illustrations than text. Our technical articles describe new and better ways to create, analyze, and use electronic images. We get our news as pictures on TV, and we analyze our data as graphs or 2-D or 3-D images. Scientific visualization is a rapidly growing field. We expect the medical profession to look inside our bodies by forming images from sound, electromagnetic and nuclear radiation. So, we are all accustomed to getting information largely through electronic images. Do I think more people would read editorials if I

included some flashy illustrations? Yes, I firmly believe that. Perhaps I will break tradition and try it in a future issue.

But you may have sensed that I wasn't primarily trying to change the editorials just yet. The point I was hoping to communicate is that every author, including this editor, should think about his readers. What do we want to communicate? How can we best do that? Would a picture really be worth a thousand words if we used one in our paper? Would a graph make our point more clearly than words? JEI tries to offer its authors a variety of ways to get illustrations into their papers because we believe illustrations provide the power to communicate better, faster, and more precisely than just words.

Let me also comment on the flip side of the argument. Should I add illustrations that are irrelevant, just to attract attention? Not usually. It is just as important to omit what does not communicate our message as it is to include anything that helps. This goes for both text and illustrations. We should ask ourselves what contribution each paragraph or each illustration makes to what we are communicating. Eliminating unnecessary parts will help communicate the main message. For that reason, this is the end of this editorial.