



## The Anatomy of an Invitation

There is a certain distinction in the scientific and engineering world in recording that a particular piece of published work is “invited” as opposed to “submitted,” even though both kinds of articles, chapters, or papers are subjected to the identical review process. The same is true for conference papers that are to be presented orally; the conference program will usually “feature” the “invited” speaker. Some presentations have the added acclaim of being “keynote addresses.” I do not deny or denigrate those processes in our culture and have often basked in the momentary glory of being “invited” and retain that fleeting pleasure as a memory permanently engraved in my résumé.

However, real life is a little more complicated than it seems: one can be really “Invited” or merely “invited.”

Recourse to a current dictionary<sup>1</sup> reveals that the verb, to invite, has several shades of meaning. For example:

**in-vite** \in-'vite vt **in-vited**; **in-ving** [MF or L; MF *inviter*, fr. L. *invitare*] **1 a**: to offer an incentive or inducement to: ENTICE **b**: to increase the likelihood of **2a**: to request the presence or participation of **b**: to request formally **c**: to urge politely: welcome – **in-vider** *n*  
*syn* INVITE, SOLICIT, COURT *shared meaning element*: to request or encourage to respond or act.

The first meaning is interesting; some authors are indeed invited to prepare a review article or a book chapter with a modest financial incentive being provided in the form of an honorarium. On other occasions the inducement is a royalty. The financial rewards, though exceedingly modest in our field, presumably do increase the likelihood of our involvement in that particular publication. (I should note that your journal *Optical Engineering* never provides those, or any other kind of financial incentive.)

The invitation to speak at a conference is usually “to request the presence or participation of” the invitee. On somewhat rare occasions there might be some inducement in the form of assistance with travel expenses and on even more rare occasions, a token honorarium.

An invitation that is “to request formally” your attendance is a dying art at the personal level (apart from

weddings), mainly, perhaps, because the particular art form has been taken over by the fund-raisers of this world, who “formally” invite us with very fancy invitations to part with (contribute) significant monies to participate in the event—several distinctive levels of sponsorship are offered. If the formal invitation is a dying art, then the formal response is dead already. Putting RSVP on an invitation does not seem to awaken the response it calls for! (But that is the subject of an interesting social essay unto itself.)

I particularly like the last meaning, “to urge politely.” And hence, back to *Optical Engineering*. We do not have “invited” papers in the earlier meaning of the word. However, our guest editors do “urge” their colleagues to prepare papers for submission to the special sections of the journal for which they are responsible. I hope that the urging is polite, but do not necessarily demand that it is! These invitations are really solicitations to submit your work for consideration for publication in the special section. The pleasure and satisfaction must come from preparing the paper and sharing the results of your work with the extended readership of *Optical Engineering*. Thus is knowledge gained and shared and the field moved along in small but definite and distinctive steps. For that privilege we even solicit (invite) you to pay the page charges. Sorry about that necessity! As editor I look forward to reading and publishing your work. I “invite” you to submit your work to *Optical Engineering*.

### Editor’s Anecdote: The Anxious Author

I received the following items in the order presented here.

Fax 12:30 p.m., 24 Dec. “These pages should have accompanied my last mailing (yesterday by overnight U.S. Postal Service).”

Letter dated 23 Dec. and received by special delivery from the U.S. Postal Service on Christmas Day (25 Dec.). “I am sending you my responses to the reviewers’ comments and suggestions which should have been enclosed with the revised manuscript that was sent to you yesterday.”

Letter dated 22 Dec., received 30 Dec. “Please find enclosed the original and a copy of my revised manuscript.”

Happy outcome. It all came together and the paper was accepted on 3 January 1995.

**Brian J. Thompson**  
Editor

<sup>1</sup>*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, G & C Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass.

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