

## My view

Robert L. Zimdahl, Editor

E-mail is a wonderful thing, most of the time. My daughter and her family live half way around the world, and being able to communicate with her regularly, easily, and nearly for free is a boon. My university notifies me of all street closures, many events I do not care to attend, all athletic booster events, and much more that isn't important to me but clutters up my e-mail each day. That is not a boon; it is a bother. The telephone made it possible to avoid writing, whereas e-mail demands writing. Therefore, unless we want to appear ignorant, we must attend to what we write and how we write. E-mail demands that we pay attention to the written word when we communicate, whereas the telephone allows us to avoid writing and pay no attention to grammar, syntax, or spelling. The speed and ease of e-mail often encourage inattention to the things good English requires. Even if it is only in brief messages, we all may become better writers if we pay attention: an unanticipated benefit of e-mail.

In science and scholarly endeavors, we learn that the work is not done until the paperwork is completed. That is, good science and good scholarship must be published. Publication demands peer review, revision, and often rethinking what we have written. More and more the publication process involves e-mail. Soon, we will have e-mail manuscript submission when everyone has compatible software and sufficient technical expertise.

E-mail is the medium we now use to ask colleagues to review an article. The previous system allowed selected reviewers to return articles if they could not review them promptly. Some did, but many who could not review immediately said "No" by letting the request wait until they could get to it; often it was months later. Now we ask before we send the manuscript for review. Potential reviewers say "No" by responding or by not responding to our e-mail request. On average, it takes seven requests to receive affirmative responses from two reviewers. That is good and I appreciate the willingness of colleagues to review and to do so carefully.

The reviews that are helpful to editors and authors are rarely brief. Good reviews show that the reviewer has taken the time to read the article and then comment carefully and accurately on the methods and results. Good reviews are critical of things that are not done well and give praise when it is warranted. Editors have a responsibility to be critical of reviewers who do not review well and to praise those who do. When a reviewer has done a particularly good job, the Associate Editor may choose to notify appropriate officers of the reviewer's organization or ask the Editor to do so.

There are some features common to all good reviews and good reviewers. The reviewer recognizes that the review role is an advisory not a decision making one. The reviewer advises the Associate Editor and Editor on the manuscript's quality and disposition. Good reviews are always rigorous and detailed but not unkind. Each criticism is documented and justified by reference to specific points in the manuscript and often by citation of other sources. These citations serve to expand the author's view of the work, enable improvement during revision, assist preparation of a new sub-

mission, or guide continued work when a manuscript is rejected.

Rejection is always uncomfortable for the reviewer, for editors, and especially so for authors. It is often required. Part of the kindness mentioned above is to offer positive as well as negative comments. It is rare (not unheard of) that a manuscript will suffer from a bad hypothesis, poor experimental design, improper or no statistical evidence, and inappropriate conclusions following a weak presentation of results. If all occur, rejection is the only course. Good reviewers may still praise the author's diligence or encourage continued work on the problem. It is a bit similar to the advice mothers give: "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything." Reviewers are obligated to say many things, and often, many are not nice. Looking for something nice to say is usually time well spent.

Common faults in manuscripts received by Editors include citations included in literature cited but not used in the text and citations of entire books when only a few pages are germane. These are easily corrected in revision if they are pointed out to authors. Reviewers can be of great help to Editors by noting similarity to other published work or clear duplication of work that has appeared in another form. Another common problem is lack of repetition in time or space. *Weed Science* has required that work be repeated, not just be repeatable by someone else. The latter is also important but is more related to the clarity of methods than to the fact of repetition. Often this is a matter of judgment. Reviewers should (and usually do) note the failure to repeat, and Editors can then act upon that or seek clarification from the author. Often the problem is not that the work was not repeated but that the manuscript does not say it was.

Reviewers and Editors have a major responsibility to maintain the manuscript as a confidential document. Methods, data, and results must not be revealed to colleagues or used in one's own work prior to publication. I am not aware that this has been a problem with any WSSA reviewers for either journal. Reviewers and Editors also have a responsibility to act as surrogates for readers. That is, we share the responsibility of assuring that our journal publishes work of high quality that is relevant to weed science, as well as important and interesting. We must admit that we have all read, and perhaps a few of us have even written and had published, something that didn't matter. It was not important and while it gained us a few administrative points, it has never been cited or noted again. It is sad, but it has happened. Reviewers and Editors have a responsibility to try to stop publication of such things without rejecting innovative, new work. Part of our role is to make the literature of weed science reliable, useful, and perhaps even enjoyable to read. It is not an easy task.

I thank all of you for your diligent work for which you receive little, if any, reward. As always, your advice on how to make the review and publication process work better is sought and appreciated. We will keep asking for your help by e-mail. Your work as a good reviewer helps make us all better writers. It is appreciated, even though we don't often say so.