

Editor's Page

Despite the IET's recent launch of two titles that *IET Communications* previously covered in its scope (*IET Information Security* and *IET Signal Processing*) the journal has experienced a significant increase in number of submissions in the last five years, and in terms of submissions and papers published, *IET Communications* is now the largest title in the IET Research Journals suite. The resulting increase in accepted papers has meant that we are publishing much larger issues and we have plans in place to increase the frequency from six to ten issues per year in 2008.

The new editorial management system, Manuscript Central, has allowed us to greatly expand our reviewer database. However, the exceptional increase in submission rate has meant that the impact on our expert reviewers' time has still been significant. We believe that this invaluable resource has, to a certain degree, been wasted on poorly prepared submissions. In order to continue to improve our times to decision and maintain our required quality of papers published, we must take steps to 'lighten the load' on our reviewers. Increasing our acceptance threshold with regard to what we send for review is one option. However, this may result in a greater chance of rejecting papers containing good work and novel ideas that have been miscommunicated (usually caused by poor presentation and/or language problems). We do of course send poorly prepared papers back to the authors until basic criteria of language and presentation have been met. However, this prolongs the review process, and authors have been known to misinterpret this as a conditional acceptance, which is absolutely not the case!

We have therefore decided to form a new communication channel – the Editor's Page – which will benefit potential new authors. The purpose of this is to reflect on our experiences of submitted papers to help prospective authors submit papers of the right quality and appropriate engineering content. Here in the first Editor's Page, we would like to highlight some basic points with regard to writing a research paper. Many authors, perhaps excellent technically, lack very basic presentation skills, and consequently many novel ideas never get published. The following comments may help authors better present their papers.

Better paper presentation

A valuable research paper represents a valuable research process and authors must make every effort to convey the novelty of their research to the audience as accurately as possible. This journal has a very wide-ranging audience from all over the globe with different backgrounds and different cultures and its success relies on clear, concise English as a communication medium.

Simplicity

This is the key to a readable paper. To quote Einstein: 'Make everything as simple as possible, but no simpler'. Authors should use:

- Short and simple sentences
- Independent paragraphs
- Natural divisions in the paper. Each paper has its own optimum structure and this will be the one that most brings out the novelty of the paper. Avoid any unnecessary or forced structure
- A format in which the reader can follow the authors' thought process from introducing the problem right up to its solution.

Directness and objectivity

We also stress that the text should address only the main points and do so directly:

- Decide what exactly should be included prior to writing
- Discuss only points an audience need to understand the title and associated process
- Avoid any unnecessarily complex or ambiguous words or sentences
- Never leave any contradictions or dubious terms in the text.

Originality

Our expert reviewers have occasionally highlighted the practice of 'copying and pasting' previous work (both their own and those of others) into their paper. Whilst we appreciate that it may sometimes be difficult for non-native speakers of English to articulate their ideas and arguments, it is highly inappropriate to use the text and works of others without clear identification of the source. Doing so is plagiarism! Previous work must be summarised in the authors' own words. Where this is not possible, the authors must make it very clear that they are directly quoting previously published work.

With novel research in hand, the origination of text for writing a technical paper is not as difficult as many think. We all have our own way of doing this but a linear approach is natural and empowers the total ownership. For this, one may start with virtually no textual structure for the paper. The gaps are then filled in as required by the audience to appreciate the novelty of the work. Any bullet-points used for the interim writing process should be removed or replaced by sentences so that the text flows naturally.

TAC: the triple match

One basic checkpoint for any prepared manuscript that will help the most with the editorial process is the three basic components of a research paper – the title, abstract and conclusions. These should complement each other and clearly point out the problem and novelty of the solutions. It is good writing practice to complete these three at the end of the writing process. If, for whatever reason, they have been decided or written prior to the main text or any revisions, one should read these three in isolation from the main text and ensure they complement each other without a need to examine the rest.

- Title: most compressed form indicating the work being done
- Abstract: in a compact form, it should indicate the problem area, the proposed solution and the outcome
- Conclusions: this should not be a repeat of the abstract, but should complement it by providing the outcome and the research contribution of the paper in a 'facts and figures' style that supports the claims made in the paper.

We hope these pointers are helpful to authors in preparing their papers for submission, and as always welcome any feedback and comments you may have.

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