Expanding *Nature Neuroscience*

Over time, incremental changes can add up to unexpectedly significant consequences. When *Nature Neuroscience* was launched in May 1998, the journal received about 80 submissions per month. Over the past seven years, the number has grown steadily to over 190 submissions per month. In contrast, the number of articles published in the journal has grown only slightly during that time. That situation has required a progressive increase in the stringency of the peer review process, year by year, which inevitably has led the editors to make tough judgments about the value and general interest of one paper over another. This month, readers will see a change aimed at reversing this trend—a 30% increase in the amount of primary research published in each issue of *Nature Neuroscience*.

What does this change mean in practice? For readers, the journal will contain more excellent research papers. The expansion will cover Articles and Brief Communications, along with the newest article type, Technical Reports, which communicate important methodological advances. The journal will continue to publish News and Views, Book Reviews, Reviews, Perspectives and Commentaries at the same rate. For authors, the most noticeable change is that the editors are now sending more papers for peer review—approximately 25% of those submitted—although editorial decisions after review will continue to be highly selective. These procedural changes will bring the overall acceptance rate of *Nature Neuroscience* in line with those of the other Nature monthly journals.

This expansion should allow most issues of the journal to reflect the full variety of the field of neuroscience, and to balance the editorial virtues of selectivity and fairness in a way that will benefit the journal’s readers. This change is not intended to threaten one of the major advantages of *Nature Neuroscience* as a high-profile journal: that its editorial process helps readers to identify the most important advances outside their own field, in areas that they may not be well qualified to judge for themselves. *Nature Neuroscience* will continue to be a very selective journal, publishing fewer than 10% of the papers that are submitted even after the expansion.

Selectivity has become particularly crucial to the journal’s readers as technological advances have made information much easier to acquire—and consequently more difficult to filter. The information explosion of the past few decades is unprecedented: 80–90% of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today. The distribution of their work has increased accordingly, with the number of scientific papers doubling about every 10 years and the number of journals doubling every 15 years. In addition, many papers are available on the internet, and improved search engines are making them easier to locate, though no easier to evaluate. The field is testing a variety of solutions to the problem of helping scientists to identify the best papers in their area of interest, but many rely more on popularity measures, such as web hit rates, than on measures of scientific quality as judged by experts in the area. Until web filters become considerably more sophisticated than they are today, the role of high-profile journals in selecting impressive papers will continue to be important.

The field of neuroscience as a whole has been increasing in size by almost any measure, though it would be tempting to propose that editorial excellence is the reason behind the growth in submissions to *Nature Neuroscience*—and indeed we hope that this is an important part of the motivation for the steady increase in papers received since the journal’s inception. The membership of the Society for Neuroscience has expanded from 28,350 in 1998 to 36,183 in 2003. This growth is also reflected in the increasing international presence of the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies; its most recent meeting in 2004 drew over 5,000 attendees from around the world.

Neuroscience publishing has been growing as well. There are now over 300 journals in neuroscience indexed by the Institute for Scientific Information, with more added every year. Other neuroscience journals have moved to biweekly or weekly publication schedules in recent years, yet *Nature Neuroscience* continues to receive many high-quality submissions. In light of this increase in the availability of good papers, the editors hope that expanding the size of the journal will ease the burden on authors and editors alike, by allowing the journal to publish more high-quality work.

On the subject of making life a bit easier for *Nature Neuroscience* authors, potential contributors may also be interested to learn about a new service that has recently been initiated by the Nature Publishing Group. If the editors of any of the group’s journals decide to publish a paper that has been submitted through the online manuscript tracking system, the authors will have the opportunity to transfer the paper automatically to another journal in the group by clicking on a link provided in the decision letter, without having to re-enter their data or upload the manuscript files again. This link will be provided for all rejected manuscripts, without any selection by the editors of either journal. The available journals include not only Nature journals like *Nature Neuroscience*, but also journals run by academic editors that are published by the Nature Publishing Group, such as *Molecular Psychiatry* and *Neuropsychopharmacology*.

Authors should note that if the paper has been reviewed, the transfer will include all the referees’ reports on the current and previous versions of the manuscript. Thus authors who wish to have a manuscript considered independently, without reference to the previous reviews, should submit the manuscript directly to the new journal, rather than using the transfer link provided.

Together, the research content expansion and the new manuscript transfer system should improve the experience of potential contributors to *Nature Neuroscience*. The editors welcome feedback on either change, which can be sent to neurosci@natureny.com.