

Announcement: Editors' Suggestions: Another Experiment

In an editorial in its first issue, July 1958, Editor Sam Goudsmit described *Physical Review Letters* as “an experiment.” He had already laid out the plan in an April 1958 announcement in *The Physical Review*: As of 1 July what had been “Letters to the Editor” would be collected in a biweekly stand-alone journal, to be called, perhaps unsurprisingly, “*Physical Review Letters*.” Goudsmit stated that the aim of the new journal would be to “make important results available promptly to all physicists,” thus “increasing the interaction of results on related work.” To this end, the journal would publish a limited (“only about fifteen per issue”) number of Letters that covered all areas of research.

With great prescience, based on his understanding of human nature, Goudsmit noted that the new journal might “become very popular with authors and could soon grow beyond reasonable bounds.” Indeed, the journal more than quadrupled in size in its first ten years, with the 345 pages of Vol. 1 growing to 1860 in Vol. 21, 1968. In response, in 1964 the journal shifted from biweekly to weekly publication. Fairly steady growth has continued, to 7800 pages in Vol. 95, 2005, despite a reduction in the rate of acceptance, e.g., from 42.1% in 1977 to 36.5% in 2004. The continued growth may be attributed both to an overall increase in research worldwide and to the concomitant development of additional subfields.

The increase in the number and importance of subfields led, perforce, to an adjustment of acceptance criteria towards specialization. This is exemplified by a subtle shift in PRL acceptance criteria away from “general interest” toward the slightly less stringent “broad interest.” This standard remains, and at present Letters should be important in at least their own and preferably also in related subfields.

Increased specialization has led, naturally, to a lack of broad accessibility in research publication, in particular in introductory and concluding sections. Often, Letters employ a shared knowledge that facilitates economical transmission to experts but confounds a non-expert. This, coupled with the large number of published Letters, makes it difficult for readers to browse in areas beyond their immediate expertise.

Many in the community, including the recent PRL Review Panel, have recommended efforts to restore the ability of PRL to give readers a broad view of current research. We could partly address the issue by a further decrease in the acceptance rate, which may yet become necessary. We fear, however, that publishing fewer Letters would reduce the value of the journal, because it would lead to insufficient coverage of some subfields. Thus we hope to find a different way to improve PRL's accessibility.

As a small first step in this direction, each week we will make a small number of “Suggestions” for readers to examine particular Letters. Our Suggestions will be based on the potential interest in the results presented and, importantly, on the success of the paper in communicating its message, in particular to readers from other fields. We do not intend that our Suggestions be taken as the most important papers in a particular issue. Rather, we hope to direct readers to Letters that lead them beyond their usual interests, into another area of research.

The mark chosen to indicate Suggestions will be a version of the printer's mark that appeared on the covers of all sections of the *Physical Review* until about a decade ago. The use of this printer's mark is intended as a symbol of our primary goal, to increase the frequency with which readers venture outside their main areas of study, and thus to foster unity in physics. A related additional goal is to encourage submission of better, more readable, manuscripts. We view our effort to mark manuscripts as another experiment, related to Goudsmit's, but much more modest. If it proves useful, we will continue.

Published 2 January 2007

DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevLett.98.010001](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.98.010001)

PACS numbers: 01.10.Cr, 01.30.-y