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“Reports” in *Science*

During 1956 the editorial board and the editorial staff of *Science* reviewed the functions and the scope of the section entitled “Reports” and attempted to define as clearly as possible the policies that should be followed in accepting papers for publication in this section.

It seems clear that the guiding principle for acceptance of reports is the interest of the readers. In this connection, it should be pointed out that reports, which are short technical papers from several fields of science, have a considerable value, both to small libraries and to individual readers who have little access to the specialized literature of science. *Science* plays a larger part in the dissemination of specialized information than may be commonly supposed. Some indication of this is obtainable from data tabulated by C. H. Brown in his recent study of scientific literature [*Scientific Serials* (Association of College and Reference Libraries, Chicago, 1956)]. His tabulations show that in 1954 *Science* was among the 50 publications cited most often in the bibliographies of a balanced selection of the world's specialized journals in five fields: botany, chemistry, geology, physics, and physiology.

Some readers think that the growth and specialization of science have been great enough to make it inappropriate for any journal to publish specialized articles in several fields; others think that the reports are a valuable section of the magazine. The editorial board agrees with the latter view and thinks that we should continue our efforts toward improvement. One way to improve the section in usefulness to both reader and author would be to speed up the rate of publication. Considerable progress has been made in this respect in the last few months. On 1 May 1956 we had on hand 131 accepted papers; by 6 December 1956 we had reduced this backlog to 11. During the same period, we reduced the time for publication (that is, the time from receipt of the paper to publication or, if revision was required, from the time of receipt of the revised report to publication) from an average of more than 5 months to less than 3 months. In order to reduce the time lag for publication still further, we shall in the future urge our referees to return papers to us within 2 weeks. If this can be generally accomplished, we hope to be able to publish reports in 6 weeks or less, on the average.

The problem of what constitutes an acceptable report for a general journal like *Science* is not easily solved. In general, papers have to be judged on a balance of factors, including general interest, interest to readers in more than one field, and interest to the specialist. Papers that are of outstanding merit in any of these respects are favored for acceptance. But there is another factor to be considered: papers must meet our limits of length (not more than 1200 words or the equivalent, including tables or figures).

We hope that by maintaining a rapid schedule of publication we will attract more papers of the kinds that we should publish and that these papers will come to us from a wide variety of fields. If this hope is realized, the probability that any reader will find one or more papers of interest to him among the “Reports” will be increased, and the section will become an even more useful part of *Science*.—G. DuS.