

# Are AMS Journals Too Slow to Be Useful?

## An open letter to AMS Members

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The first papers I ever published in AMS journals appeared in print six to eight months after I first submitted them. These days it can take six months to get the first reviews back. I think this is a serious threat to the effectiveness of our scientific journals as a means of spreading and expanding knowledge about atmospheric sciences. The first step in solving a problem is perhaps to document its seriousness. To this end I have done a small research project to see how long it takes for a paper to get into print today compared to 1970. I compared the first three months of the Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences in 1997 (6 issues for Jan., Feb., & Mar.) with the first three months in 1970 (Jan., Mar., & May). I used the submission, acceptance and publication dates of the journal articles to measure the publication time delays. It is a small sample of about 80 papers, but I think the general conclusions are robust. The trends for other AMS journals are probably similar. I have not included Notes and Correspondence in the calculations of page length or publication delays. The results are shown in Table 1.

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**Table 1: Publication Statistics for JAS in the first three months of 1970 and 1997**

Year	Articles	pages per Article	Notes & Corres.	Days S-P Sub-Pub	Days A-P Acc-Pub	Days S-A Sub-Acc	Pub as submitted
1970	44	10.4	20	179	134	45	20
1997	39	18.2	7	461	202	260	0

Codes: S-P = Submission to Publication Delay, A-P = Acceptance to Publication Delay, S-A = Submission to Acceptance Delay. All in days.

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The obvious comments are:

- 1) Average time between first submission and publication has increased from 6 months in 1970 to 15 months in 1997.
- 2) Of the additional 9 months that it now takes new work to appear in print, 7 are accounted for by the review process and 2 are accounted for by the publication process. On average, it now takes more than 8 months to complete the review process and another 7 months after acceptance before publication occurs. This is to be compared with six weeks and 4.5 months in 1970.
- 3) Articles have nearly doubled in average length since 1970 from 10 pages to 18.
- 4) Much less use is made of Notes and Correspondence
- 5) In 1970, almost half the papers were published as first submitted. This almost never happens now.

All of the above trends are troubling, especially 1 and 2. In terms of scientific communication to foster growth of the knowledge base, JAS is now much less effective than it was in 1970, because of the large delay between when work is current and when it is published.

The reasons for these trends are complex, and I will not try to list them. I will venture to say that everyone involved: authors, reviewers, editors, and AMS itself, must take some share of the responsibility for slowing down the publication process. I will also venture to say that, working together, we could all do something to speed it up again.