

A Manuscript's Journey

The most often-asked question of a journal editor is "What is happening with my paper?" At JMD, the implementation of the ASME online submission and review process (what we call the "journal tool") has helped tremendously in reducing the frequency of posing this question, since an author can track the progress of her manuscript through most of its stages. The journal tool has also simplified dramatically the reviewing process. It has also brought along its own set of headaches. Authors can actually see who might be "sitting" on their paper, and now fire the dreaded email "What is happening with my paper?" or WIHWMP, for short.

All of us editors and reviewers are also authors, and we harbor the same expectations about how the valuable fruits of our labors, our very own prized progeny, are handled by those to whom we entrust them. Editors and reviewers are also all volunteers; our journal work is in large part motivated by the social compact of treating our colleagues as we would like to be treated by them. So how do we answer the WIHWMP question?

Here are a typical manuscript's journey stages as we strive to meet our social compact. The abbreviations are AU: author, TE: technical editor, AE: associate editor, REV: reviewer. The numbers in parentheses indicate duration in weeks. An asterisk * indicates stage duration with little editorial control, the upper bound frequently violated.

AU submits manuscript
 TE assigns AE (1–2)
 AE assigns REVs (2–4)
 REVs perform reviews (4–8)
 AE recommends action (1–3)
 *AU performs minor revisions (1–2)
 *AU performs major revisions (4–6)
 AE requests re-review (1–2)
 REVs perform re-review (4–6)
 AE recommends acceptance (1–2)
 TE recommends acceptance (1–2)

*AU submits production manuscript (1–2)
 *AU submits 1903 Form
 TE checks manuscript for minor revisions and production quality (1–2)
 *AU performs any needed revisions (1–2)
 TE approves manuscript for production (1)

Using the upper and lower bounds, and without counting time for author actions and re-reviews, we see that completing a review to the point of production approval can take 3–6 months.

Perhaps some of the duration times seem excessive, even at lower bounds. But think about it: The TE has to read enough of each manuscript to decide if it fits in the journal in terms of scope and basic quality; an AE often manages several papers at the same time, as many as ten papers; requested reviewers may not agree to do the review but do not inform the AE promptly; reviewers may disagree strongly in their recommendations so additional reviewers may need to be brought in to weigh in on a majority; reviewers may recommend a certain action but the actual review text is contradictory, thus prompting further editor clarification requests; editor's other professional needs sometimes become a stronger priority; TE and AE may have to confer to reach a suitable resolution. These are just some examples of editorial complexity, but you get the idea.

Nevertheless, most manuscripts submitted to JMD journey well. Having the journal tool is a great help, and authors can always check how things are going and pop the WIHWMP question, when it is warranted. No problem. Just do not hold us too tight on the numbers above! As an old friend told me once, "The reviewing process works really well when my paper gets accepted, but it's terrible when it's rejected."

The real heroes in the process are our associate editors and we can never thank them enough for their work.

Panos Y. Papalambros

Meet Our Associate Editors: Avinash Singh



Avinash Singh started his three-year service as associate editor in May 2007, representing the Power Transmission and Gearing Committee. Avinash is a Senior Staff Engineer in the Advanced Power Transfer Group of GM Powertrain, General Motors Corporation. He received his B. Tech. degree from the Institute of Technology, BHU, India in 1990, and his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Mechanical Engineering from the Ohio State University in 1992 and 1997, respectively. Dr. Singh works on gear technology, and his research interests are in the areas of gear system design and analysis, gear system dynamics and noise, development and validation of high fidelity models, power losses, rotating system diagnostics, and fatigue life prediction. He currently serves as the Vice Chair of the ASME Power Transmission and Gearing Committee of the DED.