

Editorial

A recently deceased psychologist arrived at the pearly gates, where St. Peter greeted him and promptly offered him the choice of heaven or hell. Taken aback, all the psychologist could manage to say was, “Well, may I at least have a look at each before deciding?” “Of course,” said St. Peter, and so guided the psychologist down a long escalator. At the bottom of the ride, the psychologist saw row upon row of desks in an airplane hanger-sized room, each attended by a hunched academic, furiously typing on a laptop. “Yes, that’s pretty grim,” agreed the psychologist. “I can’t imagine spending an eternity like that; let me see heaven.” Riding up the long escalator, his excitement began to build. However, his mouth fell open when at the top of it he again stared out at a vast hall of identical academics, all pounding away on keyboards. “I don’t understand,” was all he could manage to say. “But don’t you see?” said St. Peter, “Its completely different. These scholars are getting their papers published.”

Like many of you, I have long considered the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance (JEP:HPP)* to be the premiere showcase for research in the field. If publishing a paper in this journal is not heaven on earth, it is as close as many of us will get. As such, I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to lead this journal through the next 6 years. However, an important reason for taking on this challenge is that, after many hallway chats and conference dinners, I have come to the conclusion that things are not as rosy at *JEP:HPP* as one would like. The prestige that colleagues have historically assigned to the journal, for example, in considerations of hiring, tenure, and promotion, is not reflected as strongly as it once was in objective measures of impact. On a personal level, many colleagues have expressed frustration with the long time they spend waiting for ultimately negative reviews and with the numerous rounds of revision and additional data collection demanded for papers that were eventually published. Some have called it the “*JEP:HPP* hazing.”

I hasten to add that my analysis does not lay blame on past practices themselves, which evolved in these directions for what were excellent reasons at the time. Neither does it fault the valuable people who selflessly, and often without thanks, serve us all by reviewing and editing papers. Instead, the collective shortcoming has been that we as a *JEP:HPP* community have not responded quickly enough to the changing landscape of science publication. Researchers today face a plethora of choices unthinkable even a decade ago, including open-access versus subscription-based journals, journals for which authors pay publishers to print their articles and readers pay nothing versus journals for which authors pay nothing but subscribers do, journals that allow online reading activity to dictate the status of an article versus journals that screen papers in advance for their potential impact, journals that publish articles mere weeks after they are accepted for publication versus those that publish articles as many as 2 years later. It is within this diverse and changing landscape that I want to help *JEP:HPP* find a way not merely to survive, but to thrive. In fact, I believe there is room for *JEP:HPP* to even grow in strength as the field’s premiere journal.

How will the new editorial team take on this challenge? A first step was to seek out associate editors who represented the leading rather than the trailing edge of the typical career trajectory for these positions. That is, I looked for leaders in research on action, attention, ecological perception, multisensory perception, language, and scene perception who were fairly recent associate professors. In addition to being rising stars in their own right, these associate editors are not daunted by the changing circumstances of the field for the simple reason that they have grown up in it. It’s the air that they breathe, and they already know how to succeed in it.

The second step was for our team to embrace the most important tradition of *JEP:HPP*. We agreed to hold fast to the time-honored twofold criteria for what it means for a paper to be ground breaking. As we now say in many of our action letters, a paper must not only consist of rigorously collected and novel data (an important first step), but these data must also make a significant advance in the theoretical understanding of human perception, human performance, or both (a critical second step). Keeping an eye on both sides of this coin helps authors, reviewers, and editors converge on what it means to be publishable in *JEP:HPP*. Together, we believe this vision of quality will also help to ensure the long-term value of a *JEP:HPP* article for both authors and readers.

Finally, we have set four rather practical priorities to help promote positive growth at *JEP:HPP* within the context of changing times in the discipline.

1. We aim to improve the quality and visibility of short reports (Observations). We want *JEP:HPP* authors and readers to benefit from the move in many quarters toward the rapid publication of high-visibility short

reports. These Observations will be featured at the beginning of every issue and will be published more rapidly than full-length reports.

2. We aim to streamline the review process. We will limit the time papers spend in the limbo of revise-and-resubmit by instructing editors to accept more papers as good-enough-as-is and by rejecting more papers that are not. In short, this transfers considerable control over the time lag between submission and acceptance from editors to authors, who are best able to select the appropriate reward–risk balance when submitting their articles. Incidentally, in our 1st year on the job, our team has received more personal notes of thanks from authors whose papers were rejected without review than from authors in any other decision category, despite these decisions being rendered less than 10% of the time.

3. We will foster an even wider range of approaches to the study of human perception and performance, including fields traditionally outside departments of psychology, such as neuroimaging, anthropology, physical therapy, gender studies, media studies, commerce, human factors, education, and human kinetics. We will do this while holding fast to our commitment to promote articles that showcase ground-breaking data and a clear articulation of the theoretical advance afforded by these data.

4. We aim to encourage accessible writing at every level, from authors to reviewers to editors. Our goal is to make clear writing as important as the experimental design in the decision to accept a paper for publication. After all, what is the value of science if it is not communicated to and understood by a broad audience?

—James T. Enns, Editor