

Current Comments®

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**The New Format for *Current Contents*:
Totally Electronic Composition
Will Increase Currency**

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In this *Current Contents*® (*CC*®)/*Life Sciences* and *CC/Clinical Medicine*, we have implemented an important and we hope beneficial change in the format and style of contents-page listings. All contents pages now appear in a standardized format and uniform design using a completely computerized composition system. For more than 30 years, *CC* has provided facsimile versions of the original contents pages reproduced in a journal's particular style by manual "cutting and pasting." Many of them, of course, had to be reduced photographically so that they would fit *CC*'s pocket size.

The new style is the culmination of a process that began with the July 9 issue (Number 28) of *CC/Engineering, Technology & Applied Sciences*. In successive weeks, we changed gradually to the new presentation in the other *CC* editions we publish.

During that time, we received a few dozen letters from readers expressing concern about one or more aspects of the new format and style. I have identified the main categories of commentary—all of which are understandable, and many of which can and will be addressed in the near future. The purpose of this review is to indicate the reasons for the change.

Clearly, we would not have introduced a computerized system of composing *CC* were we not facing a number of challenges—not the least of which is the continuing growth of the literature. Although

the rate of growth in recent years has tapered off in some fields, we still face the usual pressures to increase our coverage in *CC*, especially in our most popular edition covering the life sciences. Producing seven weekly "books," some of which frequently include 400 pages, long ago became a formidable paste-up challenge. Like any progressive organization, ISI® is interested in reducing costs. After all, lowered costs of production mean that we are able to provide better service over the long term.

The elimination of the manual paste-up (facsimile) process has made it possible not only to reduce expenses, but also to speed up the overall processing of journals. In fact, we expect that by next year we will reduce the turnaround time for most US journals by several days and for European journals by even more.

Until recently, all *CC* journals were processed in Philadelphia and Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Several years ago we established a production branch in Ireland that has been processing material mainly from the social sciences and humanities literature. However, as a result of installing a direct telecommunications link with our European branch, we can integrate the work of the two main groups that process journals for *CC* and ISI's citation indexes.

The growth of the European Economic Community and the recent changes in Eastern Europe make it all the more imperative that we move closer to the source of Euro-

pean materials. Instead of mailing journals to Philadelphia, publishers can now send material directly to Ireland, faster and cheaper. Once processed, the information extracted is transmitted daily to Philadelphia for further processing in our mainframe computer.

Once you recognize the need for the technological changes we have adopted, you can then address the further questions—how important is it that we retain, absolutely, the original format of each journal's contents page? Almost any format can be reproduced by computer—given an unlimited budget. In the near future, our system will permit us to scan in electronically the "logo" for each journal. In fact, it was the loss of recognition of each journal's unique logo that most readers commented on.

Alternatively, there always have been a number of readers who objected to the variation in *CC* type sizes and styles, especially when the print size was less than 5 points. Indeed, the uniformity in the new layout is considered by some readers a distinct advantage for systematic browsing.

We have chosen the single-column contents page layout because we believe it will best serve most readers. Article titles now always appear first at the far left of each page and in boldface. Authors' names follow in italics, and page numbers appear at the far right. Of course, there is nothing to prevent us from choosing other formats and/or fonts. All of these possibilities are under consideration. Once we have completed the transition to an all-electronic output, additional changes can and will be made as resources permit.

It always has been assumed that most readers scan *CC* for its subject content. That's why the titles of articles are given the lead position, as is the case in most journal contents pages. However, there are as often those who apparently scan by author. A two-column format separating authors from titles might be a possibility, if it did not consume excessive additional space. All of these possibilities can be tested. But no mat-

ter what choices are made it will be impossible to find a 100 percent consensus.

There are other stylistic problems that have yet to be dealt with. These are in fact well known to our readers who have been using *Current Contents on Diskette*® (*CC-on-Diskette*™) and *Science Citation Index*® (*SCI*®) *Compact Disc Edition* (CD-ROM). Until recently, we have been constrained by a number of processing rules required for indexing articles in our database. I've addressed these issues in earlier essays, but it may help to mention a few.¹⁻³

The processing of author names presents formidable problems, if one is to maintain consistency. Until now, for example, we have "bumped" hyphenated names so that they could be sorted consistently for listings in the various indexes. Our rules for handling author names take into account a wide variety of presentation styles and spellings in more than 7,000 journals—including thousands in dozens of different languages.

Even the treatment of simple elements like the apostrophe could significantly affect the sorting of our databases. And, given the multidisciplinary nature of *CC* coverage, the typesetting of special characters is nightmarish. Anyone who examines a copy of *CC* or the *SCI* published in the early 1960s will recognize many changes that have occurred in the evolution of our database. The implementation of new systems and conventions must be done with minimum change to what is now a 45-year file.

Browsing is part of the scholarly process. *CC* should help to optimize that process. All of us continue to browse a limited number of journals, but to keep up with the prodigious output of the modern scientific enterprise new methodologies need to be developed. ISI offers its clients a formidable array of alternatives. One of these, of course, is *CC-on-Diskette*, which makes *CC* available each week on floppy diskettes for IBM, Macintosh, and NEC computers, greatly expanding information browsing, searching, and retrieval options.⁴⁻⁶

In addition, selective dissemination of information (SDI) is offered through our *Research Alert* SM, formerly called ASCA ®.7 SDI also can be implemented through on-line networks using our *SciSearch* ® and *Current Contents Search* ® systems. In recent years, we have introduced CD-ROM versions of the *SCI* and the *Social Sciences Citation Index* ®, which I believe will increasingly become the vehicle of choice

even for weekly dissemination of information.8,9 Our chemical information services have provided abstracts for more than 30 years and now we have added abstracts to *Focus On: Global Change* TM.10 And we will be adding abstracts to our databases at an accelerated pace during the year.

As always, we invite your comments on these new developments.

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