

Current Comments

What A Difference An "A" Makes

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Like Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha*, I continue to dream the impossible dream. Today I continue my crusading pre-occupation with the trivia that make science work—or not work. Sometimes I feel like I'm on a treadmill. The faster I run, the more I feel like I am standing still. While my cries against false publication dates¹ and idiosyncratic citation practices² by various journals may have lessened, the "enemy" continues to find new ways to make scientific communication cumbersome.

There is a well-known American popular tune, "What a Difference a Day Made,"³ the name of which inspired this essay. I could have just as easily entitled it "The Split Personality Syndrome of Publishers."

Certain journal publishers want the best of all possible worlds. They want the names of their journals to become well-known. But when journals become so well-known and successful that everyone wants to publish in them, their publishers often find it difficult to make decisions. If a journal grows like Topsy, it may be time for the publisher to redefine editorial policy and allow a completely new journal to be born. Instead, when the time comes, most journals split like recombinant plasmids.

Often there is nothing more than letters of the alphabet to distinguish the new derivative parts. Thus, when the eminent *Physical Review* (which is no longer a review journal) reached mammoth proportions, it decided to split in-

to four separate editions lettered A, B, C, and D. These letters are uninformative to be sure. Although the journal is subtitled, many authors do not include the subtitle when writing citations. Without looking at a copy of the journal, how is one to know that *Physical Review A* covers general physics, while *Physical Review B* covers condensed matter physics? Other journals do not even provide a subtitle. This is provincialism of an insidious kind because it totally ignores the significance of titles to people outside the field. By refusing to name the new "sections" of the journal, the uniqueness of publishing in that journal is decreased considerably, and the opportunities for confusion are increased. In addition, I cannot understand why the American Institute of Physics, which publishes the *Physical Review* journals for the American Physical Society, should want its condensed matter physicists to have a journal whose name is less attractive, in my opinion, and less informative than *Condensed Matter Physics Review*, for example.

Lest there be any doubt about it, I am not arguing against splitting journals. On the contrary, I am encouraging it. When a journal splits in order to accommodate rapidly emerging subject areas, *Current Contents* (CC⁴) often benefits. Usually when a journal splits, the new parts fall more neatly into the general categories we have established for each CC edition. Sometimes, these

parts may even be covered in separate editions of *CC*. Consider the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series A*, mathematical and physical sciences, is covered in *Current Contents/Physical, Chemical & Earth Sciences. Series B*, biological sciences, is covered by *Current Contents/Life Sciences*.

However, not all journal splits result in such neat categorizations. *Comptes Rendus*, the proceedings of the French Academy of Science, was split a few years ago into four parts. However, *Series D—Sciences Naturelles* publishes research in mineralogy, geology, paleontology, rural economy, botany, zoology, biology, physiology, and medicine. In order to provide all readers with comprehensive coverage of this leading French journal, we cover *Series D* in *Current Contents/Life Sciences*, *Current Contents/Physical, Chemical & Earth Sciences*, and *Current Contents/Agriculture, Biology & Environmental Sciences*. I doubt that we can afford this luxury much longer. Now that the Academy has learned to live with an English contents page, is it too much to hope that it will recognize that the earth sciences should not be lumped with biology and medicine?

If publishers have to assign code letters for each part of a journal, they should at least give us a clue as to which subject specialty is represented by each letter. For example, how is one to know the difference between *Nuclear Physics A* and *Nuclear Physics B*? You can't even tell by looking at the covers. Each part is described as a "journal devoted to the experimental and theoretical study of the fundamental constituents of matter and their interactions." We had to phone the publisher to learn that part A covers low-energy and intermediate energy physics, while part B covers high-energy physics.

Someone should do a sociological study of the human process involved in deciding which part of a split-journal will be named A. To me, as a graduate of an American school, the letter A connotes a degree of excellence exceeded only by A+. The letter B means just above average. I wonder how my colleagues in systematic pharmacology feel when they are given the B section of *Pharmacology & Therapeutics* (General and Systematic Pharmacology). Whatever their feelings of disappointment, they should consider themselves more fortunate than their poor clinical colleagues who receive section C (Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics). Even they, however, are more fortunate than the "natural scientists" of the French Academy. Section D is a pretty low rating. Who says mathematics should always be named A?

There are many split journals in the ISI* data base. (See Figure 1.) A lot of them are simply split into parts A and B. (Why don't they name them X and Y?)

While most journals split because of subject specialization, the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* has a unique approach. That journal appears in an *American* edition, which publishes research from the US, and a *British* edition, which publishes research from the UK. This sort of nationalism seems somewhat anachronistic. However, this is one case where the letters A and B, which are included with the journal's volume number, really stand for something.

Even journals that use "meaningful" or mnemonic letter codes can breed confusion. The *American Journal of Physiology*, for example, now comes in five parts which can be obtained either separately or together in a consolidated edition. The consolidated journal is divided into five lettered sections (C, E, H, R, and F) that correspond to each of

Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des Seances de l'Academie des Sciences
 Series A (Sciences Mathematiques)
 B (Sciences Physiques)
 C (Sciences Chimiques)
 D (Sciences Naturelles)

Dopovidi Akademii Nauk Ukrainskoi RSR Seriya A — Fiziko-Matematichnita Tekhnichni Nauki
 B — Geologichni Khimichni Ta Biologichni Nauki

Environment & Planning A (Urban and regional research)
 B (Architectural and building research)

Geografiska Annaler Series A — Physical Geography
 B — Human Geography

Indian Journal of Chemistry Section A — Inorganic, Physical, Theoretical and Analytical
 B — Organic Chem., including Medicinal Chemistry

Indian Journal of Physics and Proc. of the Indian Assoc. for Cultivation of Science
 Part A (Nuclear, Particles & Solid State Physics)
 Part B (Atmospheric, Space, Atomic & Molecular Physics)

Izvestiya Akademii Nauk SSSR Seriya Biologicheskaya
 Fizicheskaya

Izvestiya Vysshikh Vchebnykh Zavedenii. Seriya Fizika
 Aviatzionaya Tekhnika
 Radioelektronika

Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (British Edition)
 (American Edition)

Journal of Combinatorial Theory Series A (Mainly structures, designs and application of
 combinatorics)
 B (Mainly graph theory and matroid theory)

Journal of Environmental Science & Health Part A — Environmental Science & Engineering
 B — Pesticides, Food Contaminants and Agricultural
 Wastes
 C — Environmental Health Sciences

Journal of Experimental Psychology — Animal Behavior Processes
 General
 Human Learning and Memory
 Human Perception and Performance

Journal of Geophysical Research — Oceans and Atmospheres
 Space Physics

Journal of Macromolecular Science — Chemistry
 Physics
 Reviews in Macromolecular Chemistry

Journal of Physics A — Mathematical and General
 B — Atomic and Molecular Physics
 C — Solid State Physics
 D — Applied Physics
 E — Scientific Instruments
 F — Metal Physics
 G — Nuclear Physics

Journal of Polymer Science — Polymer Chemistry Edition
 Polymer Letters Edition
 Polymer Physics Edition
 Polymer Symposia Edition

Journal of the Chemical Society — Chemical Communications
 Dalton Transactions (Inorganic Chemistry)
 Faraday Transactions I (Physical Chemistry)
 Faraday Transactions II (Chemical Physics)
 Perkin Transactions I (Organic & Bio-Organic Chemistry)
 Perkin Transactions II (Physical Organic Chemistry)

Journal of the Indian Institute of Science Section A — Engineering & Technology
 B — Physical & Chemical Sciences
 C — Biological Science

Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A — General
 B — Methodological

Metallurgical Transactions A — Physical Metallurgy & Materials Science
 B — Process Metallurgy

Morfologia Normal y Patologica Seccion A — Histologia
 B — Anatomia Patologica

Nauchno-Tekhnicheskaya Informatsiya Seriya 1 — Organizatsiya I Metodika Informatsionnoi Raboty
 2 — Informatsionnye Protseessy I Sistemy

Nuclear Physics A (Low energy physics and intermediate energy physics)
 B (High energy physics)

Nuovo Cimento della Societa Italiana di Fisica A — (Elem. Particle & Nuclear: Specific Theories
 and reactions)
 B — (General: all fields)

Papers in International Studies — Africa Series — Ohio Univ.
 SE Asia Series — Ohio Univ.

Periodica Polytechnica — Chemical Engineering
 Electrical Engineering
 Mechanical Engineering

Pharmacology & Therapeutics Part A — Chemotherapy, Toxicology & Metabolic Inhibitors
 B — General & Systematic Pharmacology
 C — Clinical Pharm. & Therapeutics

Philosophical Magazine A — Defects and Mechanical Properties
 B — Electronic, Optical and Magnetic Properties

Philosophical Transactions of Royal Soc. of London Series A — Mathematical & Physical Sciences
 B — Biological Sciences

Physica A — Theoretical and statistical physics
 B & C — Physics of Condensed Matter: Atomic, Molecular and Plasma Physics, Optics

Physica Status Solidi A — Applied Research
 B — Basic Research

Physical Review A — General Physics
 B — Condensed Matter Physics
 C — Nuclear Physics
 D — Particles and Fields

Physics Letters A (General, Atomic, Molecular & Solid State Physics)
 B (Nuclear & High Energy Physics)

Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences — Section A Part 1 — Chemical Sciences
 Part 2 — Earth and Planetary Sciences
 Part 3 — Mathematical Sciences
 — Section B Part 1 — Animal Sciences
 Part 2 — Plant Sciences

Proc. of the Inst. of Civil Engineers Part I — Design and Construction
 II — Research and Theory

Proc. of the Japan Academy Series A — Mathematical Sciences
 B — Physical and Biological Sciences

Proc. of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen Series
 A — Mathematical Sciences
 B — Palaeontology, Geology, Physics & Chemistry
 C — Biological & Medical Sciences

Proc. of Royal Irish Acad. Section A — Mathematical & Physical Sciences
 B — Biological, Geological & Chemical Sciences

Proc. of Royal Soc. of Edinburgh Section A — Mathematics
 B — Natural Environment

- Proc. of Royal Soc. of London Series A — Mathematical & Physical Sciences
 B — Biological Sciences
- Social Science and Medicine — A — Medical Psychology & Sociology
 B — Medical Anthropology
 C — Medical Economics
 D — Medical Geography
- Spectrochimica Acta Part A — Molecular Spectroscopy
 B — Atomic Spectroscopy
- The Structural Engineer Part A — Monthly
 B — R&D Quarterly
- Transactions of the Inst. of Mining & Metallurgy Section A. Mining Industry
 B. Applied Earth Sciences
 C. Mineral Processing & Extractive Metallurgy
- Vestnik Leningradskogo Universiteta Seriya Fizik i Khimiya
 Matematiki Mekhaniki Astronomiya
- Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta Seriya Fiziki i Astronomiya
 Khimiya
 Matematiki i Mekhanika
- Vie et Milieu Series A — Biologie Marine
 B — Oceanographie
 C — Biologie Terrestre
- Virchows Archiv. A — Pathological Anatomy & Histology
 B — Cell Pathology
- Vysokomolekulyarnye Soedineniya Seriya A (Papers)
 B (Brief Communications)
- Zeitschrift fur Naturforschung Part A — Physik. Physikalische Chemie. Kosmophysik
 B — Anorganische Chemie Organische Chemie
 C — Biosciences
- Zeitschrift for Physik A — Atoms & Nuclei
 B — Condensed Matter & Quanta
- Zentralblatt fur Bakteriologie Parasitenkunde Infektionskrankheiten und Hygiene Erste Abteilung
 Originale Reihe A (Medizinische, Mikrobiologie und Parasitologie)
 B (Hygiene — Preventive Medizin)
- Zentralblatt fur Veterinarmedizin Reihe A (Physiologie, Endokrinologie, Biochemie,
 Pharmakologie, Innere medizin, Chirurgie, Genetik,
 Tierzucht, Geburtshilfe, Gynakologie, Andrologie,
 Tierernahrung, und Fütterung, Allgemeine und Spezielle
 Pathologie.)
 B (Infektions — und Invasionskrankheiten, Mikrobiologie,
 Immunbiologie Parasitologie, Tierhygiene,
 Lebensmittelhygiene, Pathologie der Infektiosen und
 Parasitären Erkrankungen.)
 C (Anatomia, Histologia, Embryologia)

the separate journals. The letters stand for a key word in each of the five journals' subtitles. Thus, section E of the consolidated journal contains the same articles as the *American Journal of Physiology—Endocrinology, Metabolism and Gastrointestinal Physiology*. The E stands for endocrinology. Section F is the only section that is named for the second word of its subtitle *Renal*.

Fluid & Electrolyte Physiology. The letter codes do not appear on the covers of the five separate journals. They are included instead with the page numbers (H556, for example). Fortunately, the page numbers of the consolidated journal are numbered so that no two pages of the individual journals within the consolidated journal have the same number.

A total disaster results when an author cites *both* editions of the journal whenever an article is cited. I had thought this practice was limited to certain egocentric writers who insist on citing both the original journal article as well as the book in which it is reprinted.

Some split journals do not have letter-codes at all. Instead, a descriptive phrase is tacked onto the journal's title. This practice may make it easier to distinguish the disciplinary content of the various "parts." But this is a bibliographic disaster for everyone who must deal with absurdly long journal titles. One of the four sections of the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* is *Animal and Behavior Processes*. Another mouthful is *Journal of Experimental Psychology—Human Learning and Memory*. Such titles are a bibliographic nightmare. Inevitably, authors fail to include the full title of the section involved. So the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* will be cited even though the author is referring to an article in the section on *Human Perception and Performance*. When readers try to find these articles in libraries, they waste considerable time.

The Polish Academy of Sciences is not to be outdone by the French or the Americans when it comes to long names. Although it is no longer published in French, one part of its journal is entitled *Bulletin de l'Academie Polonaise des Sciences—Serie des Sciences Mathematiques, Astronomiques, Physiques*. The standard abbreviation is *Bull. Acad. Pol. Sci. Math. Phys.* You can't put it in less than 33 spaces. If you change *Bull.* to *B.*, you are still 10 spaces over the maximum of 20 we allow in a long abbreviation field!

The *Journal of the Chemical Society* (UK) is a good example of a journal that really has a split personality. Not long ago, the Society did away with its A's

and B's and began adding subtitles to the journal title. Unlike the previous examples, however, these subtitles do not describe the subject matter within each of the journal's six parts. One part, subtitled *Chemical Communications*, publishes "urgent, novel results from all branches of chemistry." The other five parts correspond to three divisions of the Chemical Society itself: the Dalton division (inorganic chemistry), the Faraday division (physical chemistry), and the Perkin division (organic chemistry). How can five journals correspond to only three divisions of the Chemical Society? The answer is that both the *J. Chem. Soc. Faraday Transactions* and the *J. Chem. Soc. Perkin Transactions* are split into parts I and II. Thus, they are split journals within a split journal!

The long-winded titles that result from adding descriptors onto a split journal's name are a serious, daily problem for librarians and indexers, as I have pointed out previously.⁴ I don't know whether this practice exasperates me as much as those split journals with nothing more informative than letters of the alphabet to distinguish their parts.

Just where does one put all those A's and B's when writing citations? Are they written as part of the journal's name? Or are they included with the volume number? The answer depends on which journal one reads. *Physics Letters* includes letter codes as part of the journal title. On the other hand, there is nothing on the cover of *Il Nuovo Cimento* to tell the reader which edition it is except for the inclusion of a letter in the volume number (39B, for example). One journal, *Social Science & Medicine*, included its letter codes with the issue numbers until this year. Now the letter codes are included with the volume numbers. And as I've already mentioned, the *American Journal of*

Physiology includes its letter codes as part of the page numbers.

The journal *Physica* deserves special mention here. It has three parts, A, B, and C, but parts B and C are included within the same binding. A citation of *Physica* in the *Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]) would look like this:

77 *PHYSICA B&C* 91 291

What do these A's and B's and unwieldy titles mean to us here at ISI? They are one big pain in the neck. Whether a lettered journal calls its parts "sections," like the *Indian Journal of Chemistry*, or "series," like *Comptes Rendus*, the inclusion or lack of inclusion of these letters in citations has plagued us for twenty years. Confusion over what to do with them may be the reason why so many scientists omit them entirely when writing citations. This creates chaos for libraries and scientists who have to trace these papers down. There was a time when one could find a journal article in a library simply by knowing the journal name, volume (or year), and page. This "code" is used

by most scientists I know. It used to be a universal shorthand to simplify library work.

During our recent most-cited author study,⁵ several names that should have been picked up in our computer search did not get on our list. Among them were the physicists W. C. Hamilton and G. R. Satchler. They have a predilection for publishing in journals that play the alphabet game. When we did our massive computer runs, we did not realize what a difference an "A" can make.

We have since programmed our computer to handle the peripatetic letters in such citations. Now we will find them whether they are written as part of the journal, volume, or page! The names inadvertently omitted from our study will appear in the future when we publish our list of the 1,000 most-cited authors. Maybe the injured parties will influence publishers of mitotic journals to be a little more considerate of those people who have to live with such trivia daily.

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