

# Current Comments

## How Do We Select Journals For Current Contents?

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Scientists have often told me in letters and conversations that *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> (*CC*<sup>®</sup>) and the *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (*SCI*<sup>®</sup>) are in part determining the fate of small journals throughout the world. They feel that ISI<sup>®</sup> journal selection policies compel authors to submit their best scientific articles to the most prestigious publications. In a recent letter submitted to the *4S Bulletin*, Dr. S. Maricic, editor of *Croatica Chemica Acta*, has raised this point again.<sup>1</sup> He stresses that *CC* and the *SCI* bring information about thousands of articles from the top-quality journals to readers every day. But he argues that ISI fails to cover several Yugoslavian journals, and possibly some from other small countries, that have a higher "impact" than some already indexed in *CC*. By higher impact, he means that the journals' articles have received on the average more citations during a given period (not defined by Maricic) than some covered by ISI.

I have discussed ISI's journal selection policies in previous editorials.<sup>2</sup> However, in response to Maricic's letter, and in view of ISI's possible effect on small publications, I feel that I must state them again.

Our selection policies developed over time as *CC* and our other information services grew. When the forerunner of *CC/Life Sciences* first appeared in 1957, we had no formal policies to decide which journals should be included. We

had classic studies like Brown's *Scientific Serials*<sup>3</sup> and surveys conducted by pharmaceutical and medical libraries. But we didn't need them to tell us that *Science*, *Nature*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences-US*, and others were among the most important journals in the field. Since we covered only 200 journals at that time, we limited ourselves to the best. Journal selection didn't become a major problem until economics permitted us to extend our coverage beyond this overwhelmingly important core.

In the early days, our selection policy was frequently influenced by the attitudes of publishers. Unfortunately, many publishers at that time were not enthusiastic about *CC* and feared that our *OATS*<sup>®</sup> service would damage their article reprint business. One publisher even threatened us with legal action. Other publishers shunned us until the time came, many years later, when their editors made it clear that *CC* was essential for quickly establishing the reputation of a new journal.

On the other hand, publishers like Thomas Karger and the British Medical Association encouraged us from the beginning to cover even more of their material. They recognized that the additional publicity *CC* offered would bolster their prestige, increase their journals' circulation, and promote the sale of article reprints. Thus, in our early

years, the friendliness of publishers often influenced our selection of additional journals.

In the early 1960s, we introduced the *SCI* and began to analyze the citations journals gave to and received from other journals. For the first time, we could quantify the relative impact of journals and identify additional ones for coverage in *CC*. I remember that in this way we "discovered" paleontology! Our coverage diversified to other and more specialized fields, now represented in seven separate *CC* editions. The listings in *CC/Life Sciences* alone have increased to over 1,000 journals.

While the citation studies gave us an unprecedented objective basis for selecting established journals, they were of limited help in evaluating newly published ones. We wanted our services to encompass newly emerging disciplines as well as new journals that would make major contributions to existing fields. Since it was economically impossible and intellectually undesirable for us to cover every new journal that appeared, it was important to develop a set of standards for judging new journals as well as existing ones.

These standards take into consideration both the editorial content and the format of the journal. Evaluating editorial content is difficult, especially in the case of a new journal. We consider first the unsolicited recommendations that we receive from our Editorial Advisory Board members and subscribers who ask us to cover the journal. For many new journals, particularly in the life sciences, we solicit critiques of the journals from scientists working in the disciplines they cover. We also evaluate the authors who are contributing to the journal in terms of their previously published works, i.e., how often have

they published, in what journals, and if what they've written has been cited. We consider how important the subject area of the journal is to the readers of *CC*, and what percentage of that readership is going to be interested in the journal. We assess the depth of our present coverage of the field. Is our present coverage sufficient? Further, we weigh our coverage of the geopolitical area represented by the journal. We are also very concerned with the journal's ability to keep a timely publication schedule.

Of course, the selection process must also include an evaluation of the format of the journal.<sup>4</sup> Since we are producing contents page services and citation indexes, it is important that the journal contain the basic features needed to process it for these types of reference tools. Therefore we give careful consideration to the contents page, including its photoreproducibility, the substance of the article titles presented there, the completeness of the information, the ease with which it can be scanned, the language of the contents page, etc. The journal should also include bibliographic references if it is also to be processed for a citation index. The presentation of these references should be in a format that can easily be processed and which provides complete information. Beyond these basic elements, we are concerned with author address availability and presentation since this information is used in the *Current Bibliographic Directory of the Arts & Sciences*<sup>TM</sup> as well as *CC* and the citation indexes. The accuracy of these addresses determines the ease with which authors can communicate and request reprints.<sup>5</sup>

We also check to see if foreign language journals contain English abstracts. To alert *CC* users to journal arti-

cles and abstracts in Serbo-Croatian, for example, would be of little value since so few scientists can read the language.

If a journal has existed long enough to accrue citations, its citation record is of prime importance to us in deciding whether or not it should be covered.

I have no doubt that the seven editions of *CC* cover the most important journals in their fields. For example, we found in a recent study that the journals we cover in a number of medical specialties such as urology account for 95 to 99% of all the citations in those disciplines. These studies were conducted by Theresa Rosen and Susan Jones, to whom the major burden of journal selection falls.

However, among the outer-core journals we cover, there may be some with lower impact than some which we do not cover, as Maricic pointed out. Sometimes we are guilty of pure oversight. More likely, a journal may not be covered for the variety of reasons I have outlined above: timing,<sup>6</sup> the costs of translating title pages, the lack of English abstracts. Even without these impediments, it takes time and staff to do the comparative analyses necessary to determine which journals should be dropped and which journals should be added. We are continuously in the process of reviewing our coverage, category by category and country by country. This effort is aided by statistical detail from our citation files. But the availability of the objective data does not obviate the need for subjective decisions in many cases.

I hope that this discussion will make some publishers and editors more aware of the relatively minor changes that could spell the difference between ISI's selection or rejection of their publications. I also hope that *CC* readers will be

encouraged to contact us about journals worthy of coverage. Nevertheless, I must reiterate the fact that primarily economic pressures will continue to limit the number of journals covered by *CC*. However, there may be a solution to this continuing problem.

Reprinting contents pages in *CC* costs more than indexing the publication in one of our other services. But we can consider adding an entry to the *SCI* and *ASCA*<sup>®</sup> instead of *CC*. While not providing maximum exposure, this would make it possible for the journal to enter ISI's indexing system. Should subsequent citation studies show that the importance of a particular journal rises, we can cover it in *CC*. I can see that in the future we may expand our data base and make articles from more journals accessible through *SCISEARCH*<sup>®</sup>, our on-line service, if the cost of storing the information on machine-readable tape competes favorably with the cost of paper and shipping.

At this point, does there remain a highly significant journal that we don't cover? I don't think so. And I don't think most important articles will fail to reach our readers. Even the highly-cited articles written about in *Citation Classics* which were rejected by high-prestige journals upon first submission usually found their way into other well-cited high-impact publications.

The fundamental issue for scientists in small countries like Finland, which I recently visited, is this—research of international significance can and should be submitted to the international journals. Indeed, we know from extensive studies<sup>7</sup> that the best papers from small countries are published in the international journals. It is quite possible that from time to time we overlook the low impact journal while including a few

others of even lower impact. In the days ahead, considering the great competition for space, we will probably not be able to continue covering such journals in *CC*. However, we do plan to accommodate such journals in our on-line data bases so that their material will be retrieved in comprehensive literature searches. And whenever possible and appropriate we try to accommodate a journal that is new to *CC* even for a few years. While coverage in *CC* will indubitably increase reprint requests, it does not change the basic quality of the

work. If it is mediocre it will show up in our citation studies.

One might argue that we could solve the economic problem of covering journals that are omitted by these procedures by the page charge. We tried that for a while many years ago and it simply would not work. After two years of coverage in *CC* we decided to cover the journal permanently or drop it. But it is much easier not to cover a journal than to charge for coverage because then your selection procedure is always suspect.

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\*Reprinted in: **Garfield E.** *Essays of an information scientist.* Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1977, 2 vols.