



Everybody Writes, Nobody Reads

I am happy to report that people read *Interface* magazine. Just the other day I received a long letter commenting on the usefulness of the topical articles, this one specifically detailing the issue dealing with ionic liquids. The message of the letter was that the reviews in *Interface* are just as useful as the summary articles in peer-reviewed publications. Another reader, reacting to

the side remark I made in my recent editorial about opening a dog kennel, wanted to unload his German shepherds on me. Yet another letter mentioned the Classics column and how nice it was to read recollections about scientists, written by other scientists and colleagues.

Interface does not have an officially gauged impact factor and we do not have a good measure of how well and thoroughly this magazine is read. Still, we like to hear that it is a useful medium for the members, the advertisers, and anybody else who may follow what shows up in our quarterly.

Publishing is a funny business. It was Michael Faraday, the spiritual mentor of all electrochemists, who once wrote this advice for scientific success: work, finish, publish. There are, you see, two more parts to publishing and they precede the actual act of publishing. The contemporary methods of success evaluation, the rubrics, as the assessment gurus like to call them, focus mostly on the documented last part of Faraday's recipe for success. After all, unless the work is written up and others can read about it, it has little value. And published papers are so easy to count. Add to the count an impact factor multiplier and you have a straightforward assessment tool. The higher the impact factor of the journal, the higher the perceived quality of the article, and the higher the rewards bestowed on the author once the activity reports are turned in. And this also works in reverse, for an article in a no-impact factor publication, of which *Interface* is one, brings little joy to evaluators and little credit to the authors. Lucky are the few whose departments do not embrace the assessment rubrics, lucky are those who feel that they have enough papers in journals with high impact factors, and lucky us who get to read the well-written contributions to *Interface* by colleagues who care enough and volunteer their time and writing skills to us, without earning a publication with an impact factor in return.

May it be then a reward to all the *Interface* authors to know that there is a crowd of people who read their work. For each one receiving a comment from a happy reader, there is a number of happy readers who will not send a comment. So how much truth is in that "everybody writes and nobody reads" statement? The outward success indicator of Faraday's advice is the "be published" part, which is somewhat recast onto the "publish or perish" mantra, for which the "nobody reads, everybody writes" is a wistful comment longing for the times when pressures to publish were perhaps lesser. Still, the need to publish is not a new phenomenon. The title statement is ascribed to the mathematician Pál Erdős, though this notion of state of affairs might have been circulating through science departments during his times fairly spontaneously without defined authorship. I heard it quite far back from my college instructor, who taught us the fine art of finding relevant literature in the volumes and stacks of *Chemical Abstracts*. Copiers were not accessible then, so an actual article was a precious commodity and it was thoroughly read and studied, and its ideas, properly referenced, were incorporated in our own work. And the statement "nobody reads, everybody writes" was then fully understood merely as a cynical statement, to be taken as a warning, not an instruction. To be understood the same way today, it probably needs to be followed by a colon, hyphen, and the letter J, *i.e.*, :-J, a sideways smiley face simulating a tongue in cheek and meaning irony.

Petr Vanýsek,
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A motivational sign above the author's laboratory door in DeKalb.



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