



From the Editors

The Meteoritical Society meeting abstracts

There are about to be major changes in the procedures for handling and publishing abstracts for the annual meeting of the Meteoritical Society. The nitty-gritty details will appear on the Lunar and Planetary Institute (LPI) web site for the next meeting, and there will be some words in the second circular. Essentially the same procedures will be used to produce the Meteoritical Society abstracts as have been very successfully used for the Lunar and Planetary Science Conference (LPSC) for over 10 years, except that instead of two pages authors have just under one column.

There are two reasons for this change. The first, and probably the major reason, is that for 10 years the LPI have performed a sterling duty of formatting the abstracts for publication in the journal. As funding circumstances and the community's demands change, they simply do not have the resources for this very demanding task, a task that has increased exponentially in complexity in recent years as authors make greater use of graphics and color. The meager resources of the *MAPS* office are focused entirely on producing the journal, and keeping its cost to members and libraries, and its manuscript handling times, as low as possible. The *MAPS* office produced the abstracts for 2001 to buy time for the Society to find another way, but this cannot be repeated. So our solution is to adopt LPSC methods and to publish author-prepared copy of their abstracts.

The second reason for change is more complex and also has a 10-year history. For 10 years the Editorial Board has been involved in a lively dialog to improve the journal and the work it publishes. Launched by the Drake committee report, and invigorated by new members, many with young blood and highly in tune with the future and the new methods of communication, the Board has explored every practice of this and other journals. They have laboriously identified procedures that improve our work and lead to its rapid publication. It has not been a quick and dirty process, with a report thrown together for some deadline. It has been a 10-year ongoing effort with endless e-mails, a constant stream of case studies, and two or more face-to-face meetings every year. The Editorial Board met face-to-face four times last year. High-quality peer review, and our chosen editorial and management procedures—however labor intensive and frustrating they can be—is not only leading to better papers, but results in greater respect for those papers once published, and for the journal, the Society and ultimately to the research field as a whole. Over the last 10 years *MAPS* has been a great success, however one prefers to measure success.

The Editorial Board decided on these new abstract procedures at its meeting in Rome and the vote was unanimous. The Board also voted on a number of other less visible changes that will occur over the next few months. In addition, the Editorial Board discussed at some length the whole history of abstracts in our field, and their present role, and decided that there were major problems. A recent incident moved Ian Lyon to write an editorial (Lyon, 2001). The second reason for changing abstract handling procedures is an attempt to de-emphasize the role of meeting abstracts in our work.

Conference abstracts are entrance tickets to a meeting. They establish for the conference organizers that the authors will meaningfully participate in the meeting and help determine the nature of the presentation (invited paper, oral or poster presentation and in which scientific session the paper will appear). They are also a means of facilitating discussion at the meeting. They are not and have never been intended to be publications, in the sense that a carefully crafted paper, published in a reputable journal after checking by one's colleagues, is a publication. Most abstracts are thrown together a few days before the deadline. Often they have received only a cursory review from co-authors and institutional colleagues. They have hardly ever been checked by disinterested colleagues external to the institution, and often there are major differences between the abstract and the actual presentation.

In future, authors of papers being submitted to *MAPS* will be asked to keep the citation of abstracts in their papers to a minimum, citing them only when absolutely necessary and being sensitive to the possible disadvantages of citing fragments of hurriedly written and unrefereed research work. A 650-word abstract should not be given the same emphasis as a peer-reviewed paper running to 13 000 words. Reviewers and editors will be asked to look particularly carefully at papers that put a heavy reliance on abstracts.

These changes in philosophy are not intended to irritate or obstruct. They are measures intended to improve our individual work and our collective research efforts by encouraging accurate, complete and careful transmittal of data and ideas. Surely this is the primary role of a good journal run by a conscientious team of editors.

Derek W. G. Sears
Editor

REFERENCES

- LYON I. C. (2001) The importance of peer review. *Meteorit. Planet. Sci.* 36, 1569.