

Editorial

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Several aspects of *Journal of Biology* seem to have caught readers' attention since issue 1 appeared this summer. Some of the questions asked have arisen sufficiently often to be worth addressing here. In summary, the journal differs from other top-tier journals in four main ways. First, and most importantly, no fee will ever be charged to readers of the research articles, and the authors retain full copyright, so that the articles can be freely read and distributed by anyone, from the day of publication onwards, in perpetuity. This is the 'open access' policy of all of the journals published by BioMed Central, which is currently the only publisher that is wholly committed to the principles of open-access publishing.

Why is the immediate free use and distribution of the entire article so important? Not only is it possible and desirable, but it benefits both scientists and science; restrictions on use and distribution serve publishers, not scientists or readers. Open access also allows full archiving and retrieval. Extensive efforts are being made to create public archives of the scientific literature, containing complete copies of all scientific papers. (PubMed Central is one example of this, and all research articles published in all BioMed Central journals are deposited there in full.) In time, these freely accessible archives will greatly facilitate the practice and dissemination of science, and will lead to exciting and sophisticated ways of using full-text

information, much as GenBank has done for DNA sequences. The current restrictions on access, use, and distribution put in place by most journals - even those that offer copyright to authors while in fact denying them permission to distribute their article - will seriously impede the development and comprehensiveness of central archives.

Journal of Biology differs in a second way from some of the best-known high-profile journals with which it aims to compete. Its reviewing process is designed to be as fast, fair, and constructive as possible. Decisions are made jointly by a scientist as editor-in-chief and a professional editor. No submitted article is rejected without advice from a relevant scientist, and fashion is not a consideration. And at least one of three peer-reviewers for each article is chosen from a list supplied by the authors.

The third difference comes from our commitment to maximize the impact of the research we publish. Each research article is accompanied by commissioned commentaries. We aim for the most effective presentation of data, both online and in print, and the print issue is distributed free of charge to over 80,000 life scientists.

Finally, we do not wait for a threshold number of papers of sufficient quality before publishing an issue. Instead, an issue appears whenever a research article of suitable caliber is ready for publication. For this reason, the first two issues of *Journal of Biology*

each contain only one keynote research article and its associated commentaries.

To date, *Journal of Biology* has declined tens of articles for every one it has published. This is because we are committed to publishing only the most significant research. The challenge is to convince scientists with an important story to tell to try *Journal of Biology* instead of their usual preferred journal. We have met enthusiasm for open-access publishing, and for *Journal of Biology*, across the board, from students to Nobel laureates, and at all levels in between. The merits of open access, the wide dissemination of each article, and the usefulness of the associated commentaries, result in each paper published in *Journal of Biology* having unparalleled impact. Why not make 2003 the year you discover the benefits of publishing in *Journal of Biology* for yourself?

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Editor's note

Martin Raff has recently joined the Scientific Advisory Board of Curis, the company responsible for the research article in this issue. He was not involved in the refereeing of this article or in the decision to publish it.