EDITORIAL

Credit Where It Is Due

On 30 April 2004 the APS Council approved the following guideline on references in publications, supplemental to the APS Guidelines for Professional Conduct (http://www.aps.org/statements/02_2.cfm):

GUIDELINE ON REFERENCES IN PUBLICATIONS

> Authors have an obligation to their colleagues and the physics community to include a set of references that communicates the precedents, sources, and context of the reported work. Proper referencing gives credit to those whose research has informed or led to the work in question, helps to avoid duplication of effort, and increases the value of a paper by guiding the reader to related materials. It is the responsibility of authors to have surveyed prior work in the area and to include relevant references.
>
> Proper and complete referencing is an essential part of any physics research publication. Deliberate omission of a pertinent author or reference is unethical and unacceptable.

The quality of referencing must be a responsibility primarily of authors, but also of referees, as all should be aware of pertinent previous work. Citations should be as complete and up to date as possible and can be drawn from e-print archives as well as peer-reviewed journals. Authors may be tempted to cite review articles ''and references contained therein,'' when a more judicious selection of citations is fairer to those whose work has motivated the paper in question. We ask referees to include the adequacy of references in their assessments and authors to respond when missing references are noted.

We realize that one cannot know everything. Claims of novelty (which we discourage) are sometimes shown to be confirmations of previous work of which the authors were unaware. It is not unethical to omit a reference accidentally or in ignorance, provided that a prompt correction is made. If a paper is close to publication and is found to lack an important reference, a note of acknowledgment can be added in the conclusion. After publication, a simple Erratum, rather than a Comment, will suffice.

Failure to reference can cross the line to plagiarism when a deliberate omission creates the impression that authors of the later paper conducted the research reported in the omitted reference. This and other equally serious matters are addressed in the APS Guidelines for Professional Conduct.

Ideally, more diligent searches, broad reading, consultation, and generous referencing can head off most of these problems before submission.

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