

Everyone knows it's obvious

One of our editors' favorite annoyances is the "everybody-knows" syndrome. They ask for the first names of persons who appear in a meeting report, and the author tells them, "Everybody knows them." "Everybody" turns out to be the hundred participants at the meeting and the 500 others who might have been there. They ask for some words to label an axis of a graph instead of a symbol, and the answer is, "Everybody knows what k represents." "Everybody" is all the experts who know all about the subject already. They ask for the definition of a specialized term and hear that everybody knows it.

"It's an infection that's creeping through the body scientific," said an editor. "Like a bunch of poets who agree on the message and worry about how to get it across, a lot of scientists concentrate on impressing their friends who already know what they are trying to say. But we are sending out 50 000 copies of *PHYSICS TODAY*, some to students, some to theorists, some to acousticians, some to particle people. We want them all to be able to understand all of it. No one among the readers knows the technical terminology of all the branches. Even if they did, we would still be concerned about the nonphysicist who might glean a grain or two from what we publish. The things that are already obvious to everyone are not the ones we are looking for. And they shouldn't be the things a good scientist wants to write about."

G is for Giga and Geneva

We have our troubles with BeV and GeV. In Britain a billion is 10^{12} ; in the US it is 10^9 , and we don't intend to confuse either side with the other definition. Thus it is easy to accept the recommendation of the standards organizations and adopt Giga- and G for 10^9 .

Victor Weisskopf faced the problem in a talk. "GeV—oh, I'm sorry. That's Geneva electron volts," he said. "Over here I have to remember to use Brook-

haven electron volts." We hope that no further confusion will arise if someone sees "Weston" on a voltmeter.

We made the Readers' Guide

The editors around here are inflated. They have just found out that "by vote of the subscribers" *PHYSICS TODAY* will be added to *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, an index aiming to give a balanced diet in scientific and non-scientific fields. I'm having trouble getting them off the clouds and back at the typewriters. They don't realize it's not their work but popular taste that is improving.

How to handle "Books"

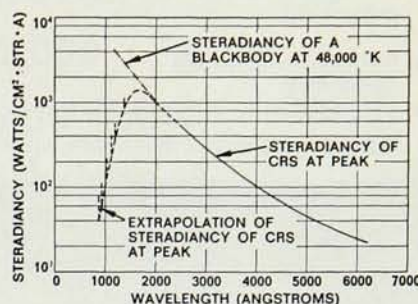
"Why did you publish that nasty review on page XX?" a fellow wrote recently to our "Books" editor, Gerald Present. Like any criticism that arrives in the office, this remark stimulated some discussion among the editors, and before they were through, I had learned a lot about how Jerry runs the "Books" department.

He says that *PHYSICS TODAY* receives about 600 books a year from publishers. Among them, of course, are some that Jerry solicits after he and other editors become aware of their planned publication, but in general you can count on publishers to keep you informed.

Out of the 600 received, about 500 rate a listing under "New Books"; cookbooks and biology don't get listed. A "New Books" list goes each month to the printer and to about 150 regular reviewers (physicists, chemists, engineers, astronomers), who request books they want to review. Not all the books are offered, though. Jerry marks the 20 or so that appear to be important enough for review among about 40 on the monthly list. Of the 20, a few drop out, some through reviewer delinquency, some because a reviewer recommends, on closer study, that a book he received should not be reviewed. So we get down to the 15–20 reviews that appear each month.

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and books, castigation of delinquents, replacement of books they fail to review, copyright problems, the search for titles and illustrations and reviewer biographies—these are some of the problems that keep Jerry hopping. Meanwhile he finds some amusement in the job. There is, for example, the reluctant friend of an author who won't review the book because he doesn't think it's good—and besides he's working on a better one himself. Then there are the imitators—other magazines indulging in the highest form of flattery.

Why a nasty review? The purpose of the department, says Jerry, is to tell the reader about the books: what is in each one, why it is important, how well the book serves its purpose. Not all books are good, and it would be a disservice to pretend they are. Moreover one would like to steer publishers and authors away from bad practices. Who knows? We might do some good.

The melody of relativity

Speaking of poets, let me offer you the poem Robert Bennett sent us recently from Houston, Texas. "Upon studying a modern physics text," he says, "I was impressed by the poetic terms in which Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity was presented." Here is what he wrote:

Special Theory of Relativity

Stood Michelson-Morley in luminiferous ether
Which had no effect.

Postulate ether drag, but aberration of starlight
Would not support it.

Maxwell equations to Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction
No time dilation?

Vectorial c , but spurious eccentricity
In orbits of stars.

Laws independent of constant translational motion
Of reference frame.

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