

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR A GOOD CONFERENCE PHYSICIST

Wlodek Zawadzki

One learns a great deal about one's fellow physicists in editing the proceedings of a big international conference. A group of people I had always thought of as being rather narrow in their ways turned out to behave in the most diverse fashion.

Consider one example, drawn from my actual experience: The deadline for typescripts is 1 July. How do the contributors respond? One physicist (Japanese) sends his contribution, beautifully prepared, a month before. Quite a few others turn in their papers on the deadline. Some send telexes on 30 June, announcing that their typescripts will follow on 2 July. An author from a sunny country writes: "Please note that we are not currently able to provide the manuscripts; they will be mailed by the end of July. P. S. Please do not reply at this telex number." (At this point half of the organizing committee wagers that the authors have not done the work yet; the other half, that they decided to go on vacation first and write the paper later.) A large number of authors send papers late, without a word of explanation. Some bring their papers to the conference, six weeks after the deadline, as if they haven't heard of it. One author appears on the last day, hands out his typescript—written in violation of all the rules—and insults the editor, who does not want to take it. Some come and say they haven't prepared their typescripts; some don't even come to say that. A well-known physicist, asked about his contribution, answers disarmingly, "I was too lazy to prepare it." Quite a spectrum, isn't it?

Wlodek Zawadzki is a professor at the Institute of Physics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in Warsaw. This column is adapted from his concluding editor's remarks in the *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on the Physics of Semiconductors, Warsaw, 1988* (Institute of Physics, Warsaw, 1988).

There are, however, other extremes. A contribution arrives on which half of the authors named on the accepted abstract are missing (including the first) and a few others have been added. Whom to believe: the abstract or the paper? Two different versions of the same paper are received, bearing the same title and authors. (Clearly, we choose the one that was typed on a better word processor.) Another contribution has three sets of six original figures, hand-drawn neatly in black ink. Not too many institutions can afford that!

In a letter accompanying his typescript an author writes, "We asked for an invited paper but unfortunately got only a poster." This complaint expresses the widely shared notion that a poster is worth less than an oral presentation. Judging by the very hot discussions during the poster sessions at the Warsaw conference on semiconductor physics, this opinion is wrong. Successful posters elicited more than 30 preprint requests. No oral presentation drew such a response. It is true that a poster presenter is in the position of a seller on the market, which can be awkward if there are no buyers. One Polish physicist solved this problem by sitting somewhat away from his stand and watching the "buyers" discreetly: Only when somebody better known came by would he approach and advertise his "merchandise."

There has been a lot of talk that these days there are too many conferences and too many publications. One of the participants at the Warsaw conference, who did not submit his invited contribution, said: "I've published it before; why should I do it again? An extended abstract and a list of references would be enough." There are, clearly, more and more conferences, whose organizers need invited speakers and want to publish proceedings. As a result the paper mill turns faster and faster. People argue also, not without reason, that a four-page paper in a conference pro-



ceedings does not say much and in any case the book will not be widely available, so that one has to publish in a journal (the *Physical Review* or the *Journal of Applied Physics*, since these are the only *Zeitschriften* read by the Americans).

All this is true, but it is hard to reverse the tide. There most probably will be more and more conferences and publications in the future. Facing the inevitable, here are ten commandments for a good conference physicist:

I

COME TO THE CONFERENCE.

(Otherwise, your colleagues might think you do not exist anymore. It's

OPINION

cool to come without a paper: It suggests you've risen pretty high.)

II

DO NOT SUBMIT AN ABSTRACT IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE AT LEAST 15% OF THE WORK.

(It just might get accepted!)

III

KEEP AT LEAST ONE COMMON AUTHOR—PREFERABLY YOURSELF—BETWEEN THE ACCEPTED ABSTRACT AND THE ACTUAL PAPER.

(This will help the organizers to identify the work.)

IV

KEEP THE SAME KEY WORDS IN THE ABSTRACT AND THE PAPER.

(You can, of course, reverse your conclusions.)

V

DIVIDE YOUR WORK AND SUBMIT TWO ABSTRACTS WITH RELATED TITLES AND THE SAME AUTHORS.

(The program committee, doing its sacred duty of slashing submissions by half, will accept a combined version. On rare occasions a committee has first combined and then rejected papers, but that's malicious.)

VI

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF PRODUCING AN ERRONEOUS PAPER.

(Nobody will notice it. People don't read papers these days; they just write them.)

VII

CLAIM YOU'VE OBSERVED SOMETHING BIG—SAY, NEGATIVE OR IMAGINARY FRACTIONS IN THE QUANTUM HALL EFFECT.

(Even if it isn't true, it will keep your name in the limelight for years to come.)

VIII

AVOID NOMINATING YOURSELF AS AN INVITED SPEAKER; RATHER, ENCOURAGE A FRIEND TO DO IT FOR YOU.

(You can return the favor at the next conference.)

IX

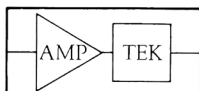
DO NOT SUBMIT MORE THAN FIVE ABSTRACTS.

(You will not beat You-Know-Who anyway!)

X

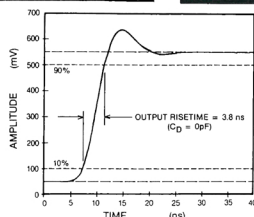
TRY TO BECOME THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS EDITOR ONE DAY.

(It's the easiest way to put your name on a book.)



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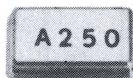
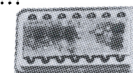
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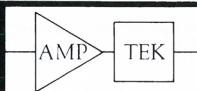
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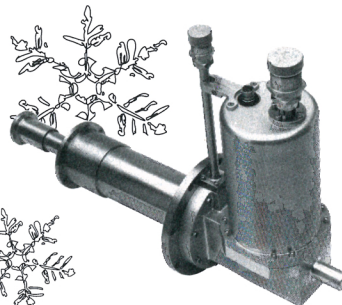
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