

EDITORIAL

American Mineralogist in Transition

ROBERT F. DYMEK AND ANNE M. HOFMEISTER, EDITORS

Department of Earth and Planetary Science, University of St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri 63130

Mineralogy, petrology, and geochemistry have undergone rapid changes in the past few decades. An influx of new techniques and simultaneous advancements in instrumentation have altered forever the procedures by which minerals and rocks are investigated. Although future advances are expected to continue, we may have passed the peak number of studies that investigate properties of minerals and rocks, *sensu stricto*. The mode of growth now and in the near future will probably be in subsidiary and cross-disciplinary fields, coupled with expansions into entirely new and unanticipated areas of research. Our mission as the new editors of the *American Mineralogist* is to take advantage of these kinds of opportunities.

On a day-to-day basis, the most far-reaching advancement of the past several years has been the influx of personal computers into the office and home. The speed with which manuscripts can be prepared has increased dramatically, due to the availability and low pricing of these devices. More recent developments (the Web and electronic mail) have made the personal computer absolutely indispensable. Whereas the next major step in this area of technology is difficult to predict, it is likely to involve networking and centralized computing.

Given the rapidity of change in the computing world, in science, and in publishing, it is time to rethink how the *American Mineralogist* goes about its tasks. Input from the Mineralogical Society of America Council has galvanized your new editors to set into motion a plan for changing our processing of manuscripts and eventually our publication procedures. Some of the changes will be immediate, some gradual, over the next few years. Many of these will be transparent to the readership, as they involve the way in which manuscripts are handled.

Foremost, we recognize the growth in non-traditional areas, and we seek quality papers in diverse subjects. In a changing field, review papers are important as markers of progress and as tutorials. Our plan is to extend invitations for such submissions. The contrasting research experience of the new editors should be useful in this effort, as we span a significant portion of the breadth of mineralogy. One of us (R.F.D.) is a field petrologist who utilizes mineralogic data in the study of geologic problems. The other (A.M.H.) calculates physical properties from *in situ* spectroscopic measurements and applies those results to geophysical problems. Moreover, our board of Associate Editors represents an even broader range of disciplines comprising mineralogy. Collectively, we hope to recapture lost constituents of this journal and to expand our coverage into exciting new fields such as geomicrobiology and environmental mineralogy.

Of almost equal importance in a rapidly changing field is rapidity of publication. We are cautiously optimistic that the time between submission and appearance of an article in print can be decreased eventually to six months, while maintaining the high standards of the journal, through careful management of the review process and manuscript handling. Much is to be gained by

speeding up publication time, and we ask our authors and reviewers to work with us and with the Associate Editors to achieve this goal.

The submission-to-publication process is divided in three components: review, revision, and preparation for the actual printing. (1) At present, we request that reviews be completed within three weeks time, but this deadline is infrequently met. We realize that conflicts with teaching or other professional responsibilities, travel, field work, and personal matters can render rapid turnover impractical for all cases. Nevertheless, we will promote rapid review through electronic communication, fax, and email. Although our intrusions may cause some irritation, we think this change in policy is not overly burdensome and will be helpful to the discipline as a whole. (2) The average time taken by authors in revising manuscripts is now three months. We hypothesize that the long review process may to some extent feed the slowdown of this second component, as an author is likely to have moved on to other things during a long interval. Current policy requires that "slow letters" be sent to authors after four months, and a manuscript is considered withdrawn after ten months. We intend to shorten these intervals to two months and six months, respectively. Obviously, extenuating circumstances do exist, and it is scarcely our intent to forfeit publication of good papers by unwavering adherence to deadlines. However, it is highly beneficial to the author (and to the journal) to publish material on a timely basis. Accordingly, a concerted effort will be made to encourage rapid turnaround by the authors. (3) Finally, the long time involved in preparing and printing the manuscripts results largely from the bimonthly offering of the journal. We would like to change the frequency to monthly, but to do so means that our submission rate must increase substantially. Thus, this change to monthly publication is a long-term goal that depends on our success in other areas. Processing time can be reduced by other means, and it is the burden of the editors and of the capable and dedicated editorial staff in the Washington, D.C., office to bring this about. We have already changed the flow of papers between associate editors, editors, and the office and are considering various approaches to desktop publishing.

We submit that the *American Mineralogist* occupies a special niche in the Earth and Planetary Sciences by providing a forum for scholarly documentation of research on natural materials—broadly defined. We wish to preserve this character while enlarging the journal's scope and readership. As an indication of our anticipated broadening of the journal, please note the new subtitle appearing on the cover page: "An International Journal of Earth and Planetary Materials."

In closing, we would be remiss if we did not point out how much is owed to the out-going editors, Ted Lobotka and Rich Reeder, for their efforts in establishing the current strong foundation of the journal upon which we can build our proposed changes. We look forward to an exciting four years as your editors and to carrying the prestige of the *American Mineralogist* into the coming millennium.