



Submitting to a Journal

The peer-review process



Selecting the journal

- Decide as early as possible on your first choice journal
- Check the audience and scope of the journal
 - You can find it in the printed version or on the Web
 - Contact the Publisher or Editor if in doubt
 - Browse the back issues to understand the journal's style and scope
- Select the journal that will provide the most recognition and the right audience for your work
- Recommendation from a colleague



Possible differences in journals

- Submission requirements
 - Cover letter
 - PDF or source files
 - Reference format
 - Table format
- Supplementary information



Before submitting your article

- Check that you have approval from all co-authors
- Are there any internal procedures that you need to follow that are specific to your institute or group?
- Have you obtained all of the permissions you need for figures you may have used that are from others' work?
- Have you agreed the funding to pay for color, pages, open access (where appropriate)?



Submitting your paper

- Details you will need to provide:
 - Full details of authors:
 - affiliations / addresses of all authors
 - contact details of ‘corresponding’ author
- Nominate an alternative contact if the corresponding author is not available
- Copyright form (which may have to be signed by all authors)
- Follow ‘Instructions for Authors’

Ethics in writing a scientific paper

- The article should not be under consideration by another journal
- Get permission to reproduce other material that has been published elsewhere
- Journals have an ethics policy: Plagiarism can lead to serious consequences



Copyright

- Copyright
 - Protects an original idea expressed in the paper
 - Often journals require transfer of copyright to the publisher
- Permissions to use copyright-protected material
 - Generally require written permission of author and publisher

The Peer-Review Process

Refereeing Practices and Policies

The focus will be on the situation at The Astrophysical Journal, but the sister journals (MNRAS, A&A, and AJ) follow similar practices

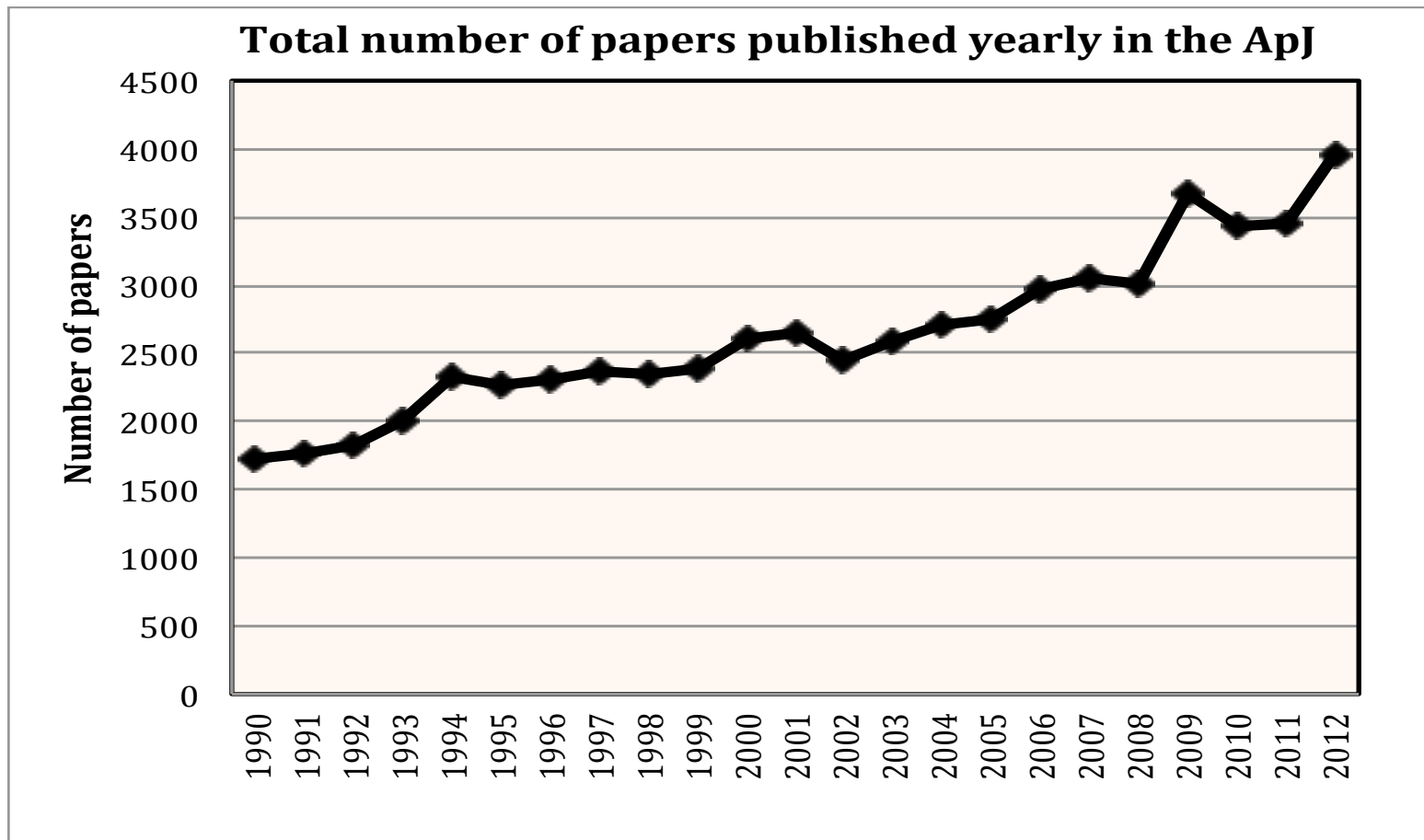


Figure 1. Total number of papers published in The Astrophysical Journal during the period 1990 through 2012. Included in this tally are ApJ Letters as well as papers in the Supplement Series.

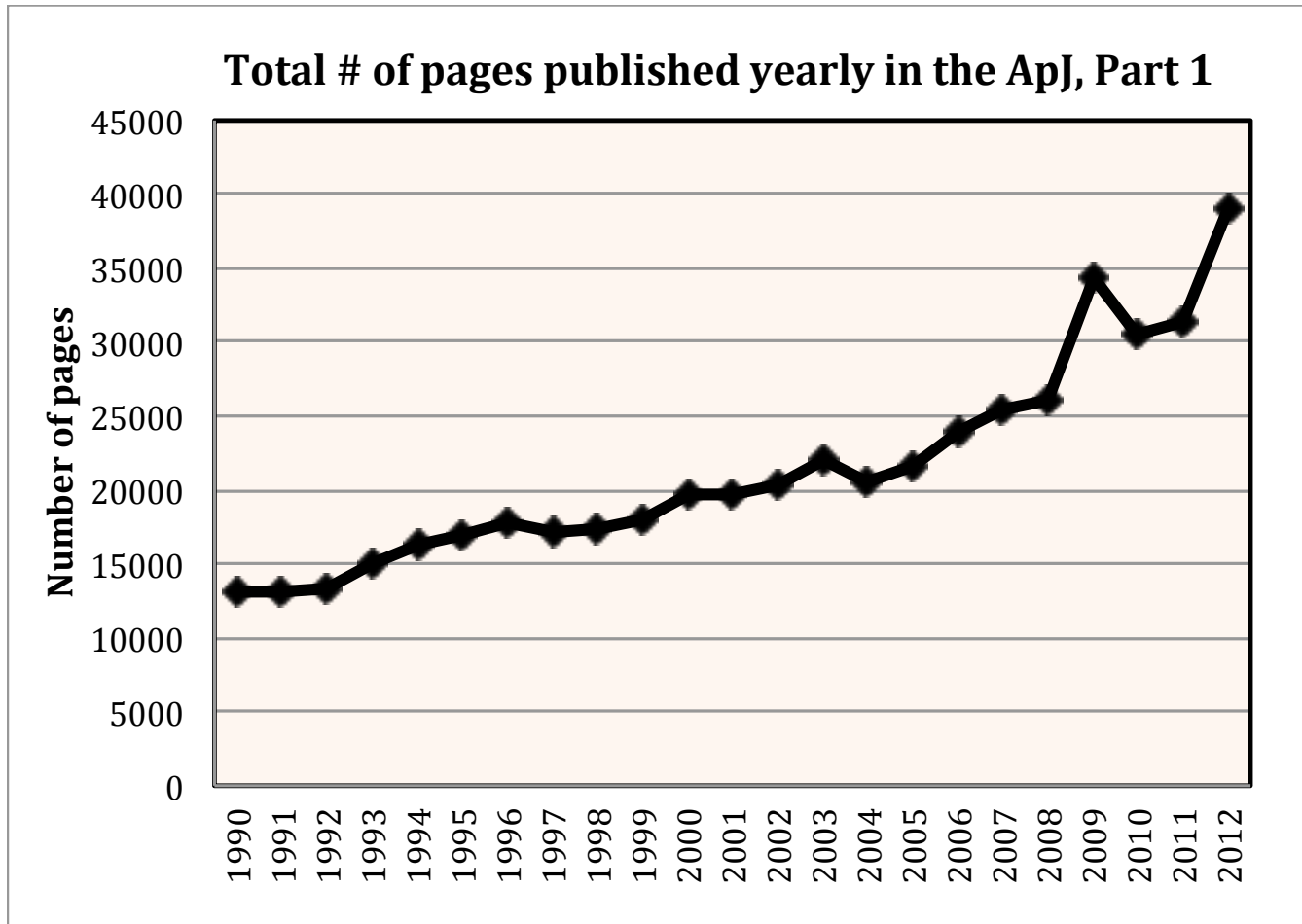


Figure 1. Total number of pages published in The Astrophysical Journal, Part 1 (the “main journal”) during the period 1990 through 2012.

The Astrophysical Journal (Part 1) receives about 75 new submissions each week. All but a few enter the peer-review process. (Every manuscript that is accepted for publication has been through the peer-review process.)

What submissions are stopped at the gate, and do not proceed to be refereed?

“Comment papers” that only criticize or comment on earlier work, without adding original new results, are not considered for publication.

(If an otherwise appropriate manuscript criticizes earlier work, the criticized author can be asked to comment, but not to serve as formal referee.)

To be considered for publication, a manuscript must pass the “Least Publishable Unit” criterion.

Avoid “salami slicing”

Some submissions are judged to be
more appropriate for a journal
other than The Astrophysical
Journal

Some submissions are judged to be
crackpots

All submissions to The
Astrophysical Journal are subject
to a plagiarism checker.
(iThenticate, CrossCheck)

Avoid plagiarism!



Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwOJvWhF_08

Only a few % of the submissions
are stopped at the gate.

The manuscripts that will enter
peer review are assigned, each
Tuesday, to one of the 20 Scientific
Editors.

Manuscripts are assigned to the SE whose own expertise matches the subject matter of the manuscript.

The Scientific Editor then chooses the referee, supervises the process, adjudicates any impasses, and makes the final accept/reject decision.

The goal of the peer-review process is to arrive at publication.

The acceptance rate for the ApJ (and its sister journals) is between 85% and 90%.

The process should be viewed as a constructive, and in fact, as a positive one.

The Scientific Editor is expected to have a general knowledge of the subject of the manuscript. The referee is expected to be quite expert in the field.

Who is chosen as referee?
It seems a good principle to
consider every publishing
astronomer, worldwide, as a
potential referee.

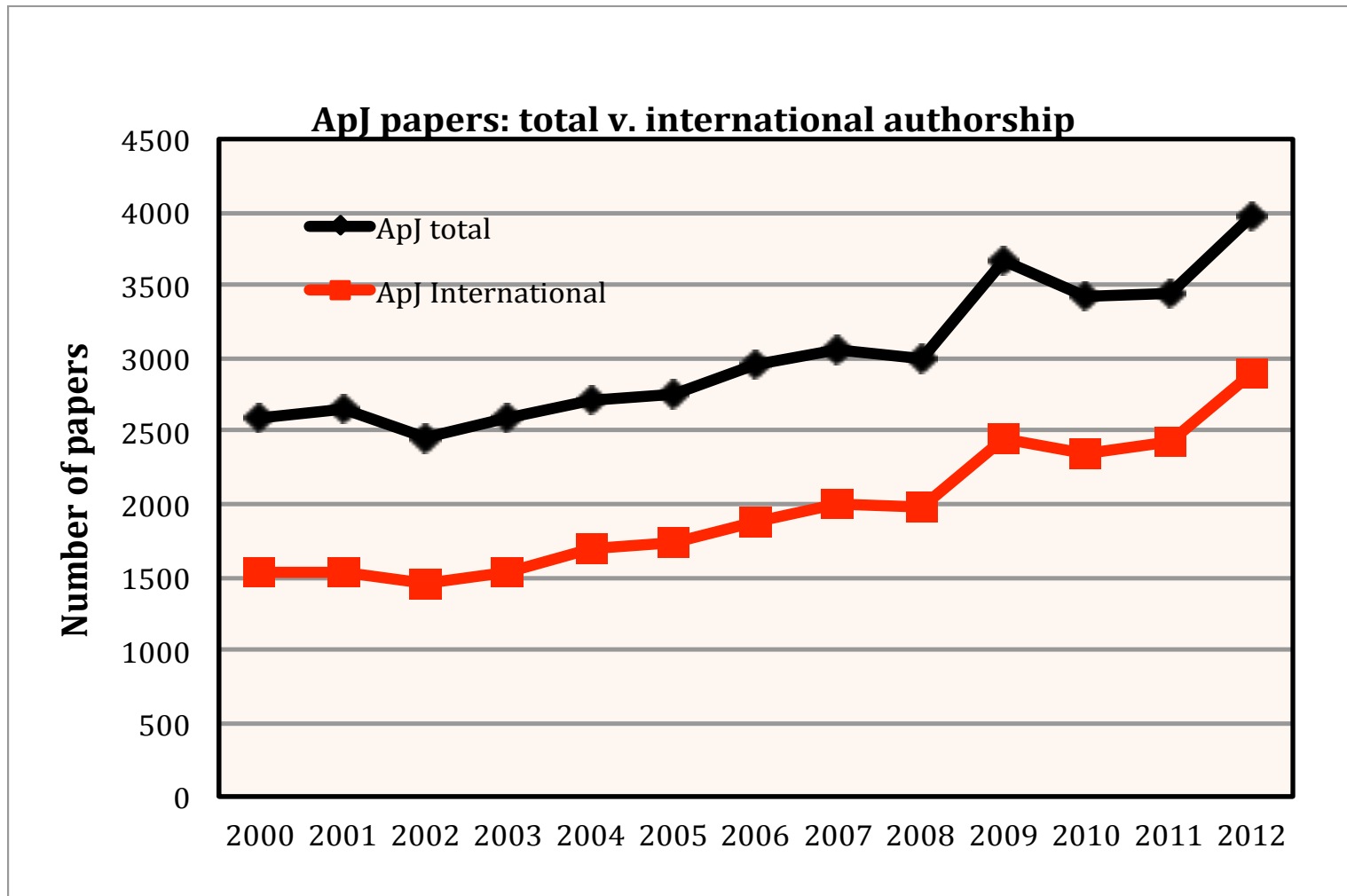


Figure 1. Number of publications in the ApJ with at least one (co-)author affiliated with an institution outside of the US, compared with the total number of papers published. Most ApJ papers have an international authorship

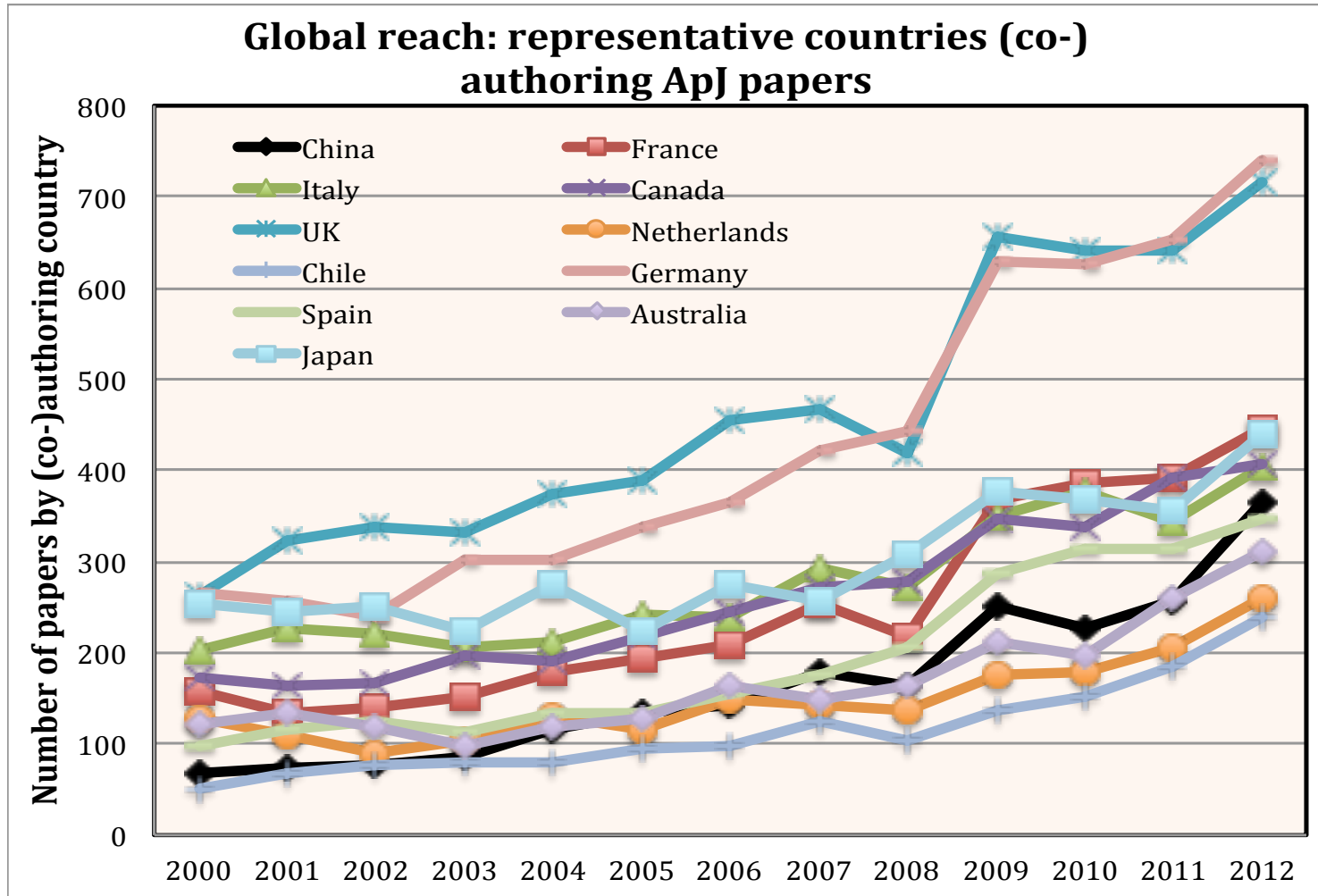


Figure 11. Number of papers published in The Astrophysical Journal (main journal and ApJL and ApJS) with authors affiliated with institutions in the representative countries indicated.

Choice of referee

Not someone who has co-authored with the authors of the paper.

Not someone from the same institution.

Referees are asked about potential conflict-of-interest situations.

The ApJ keeps a databank on authors and referees.

Who has served as referee, when, on which subjects, length of time in submitting reports, etc.



How to be a good referee

Are you an expert? Conflicts of interest? Busy?

Accept or decline invitation early – don't ignore

Comment on accuracy, novelty, interest, referencing, clarity and presentation

Provide detail to aid authors to improve their paper

Provide your report in a timely manner

No need to correct the English – unless it affects the scientific content or understanding

Let's pause: refereeing involves a substantial amount of work, and experience shows that it is almost always carried out constructively.

When a candidate referee does not accept the invitation, a reason is sometimes given; it is very helpful if alternative candidates are suggested.

The choice of referee is sometimes complicated, e.g. for a case of a highly specialized manuscript, or for a manuscript with very many authors from very many institutions.

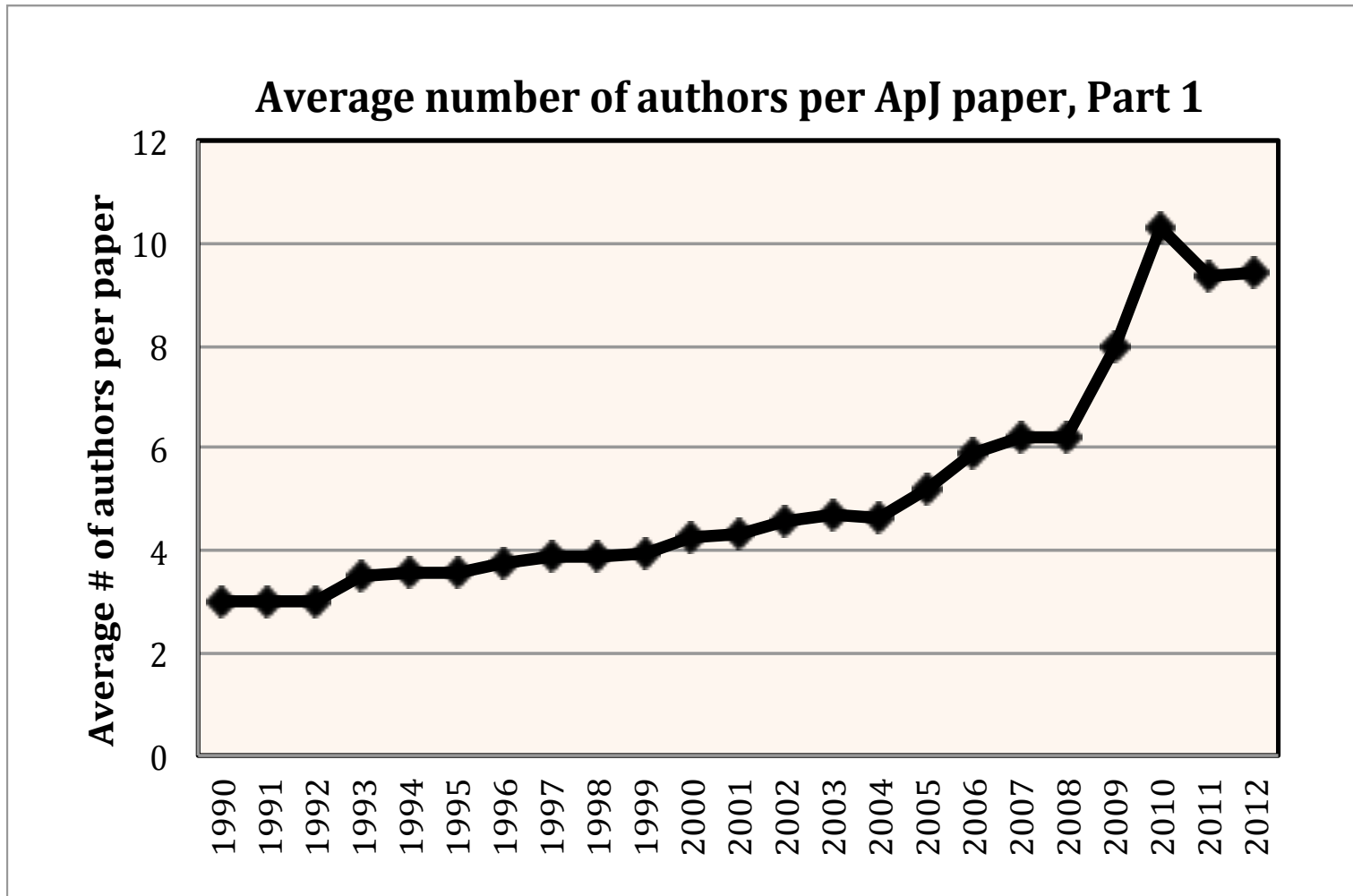


Figure 1. Average number of authors per ApJ main-journal paper for each year in the period 1990 through 2012.

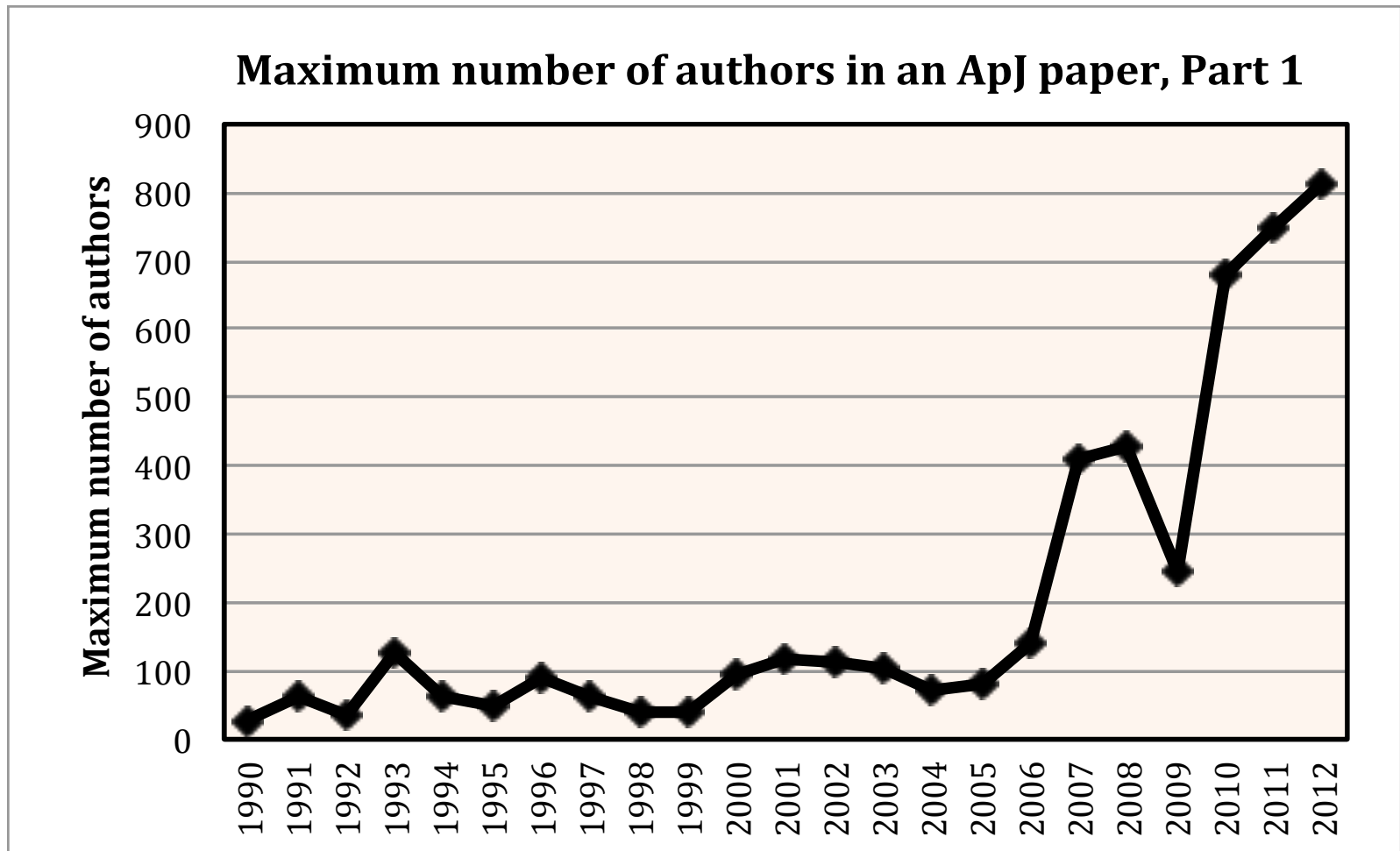


Figure 1. Maximum number of authors in an ApJ main-journal paper during each of the years 1990 through 2012.

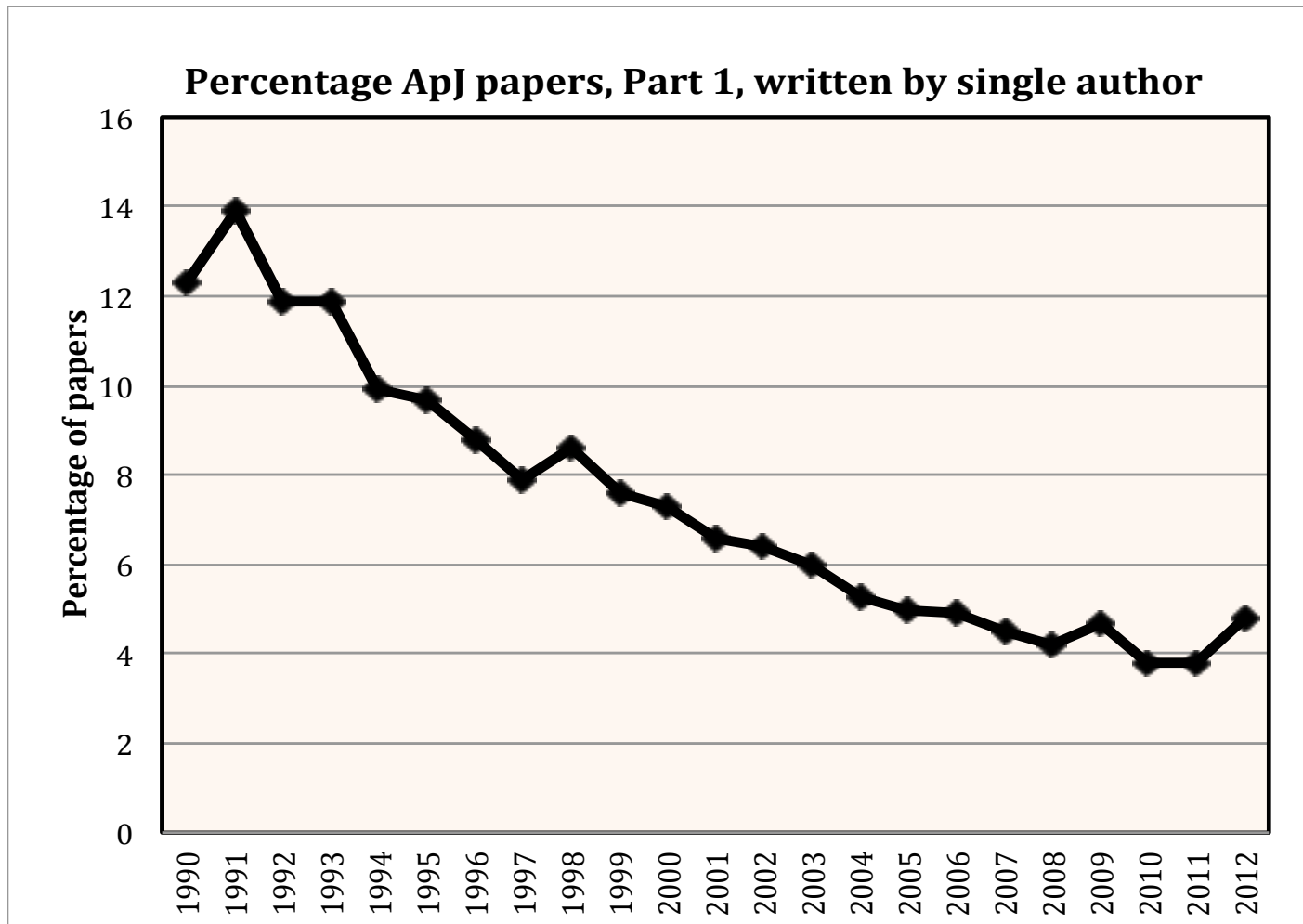


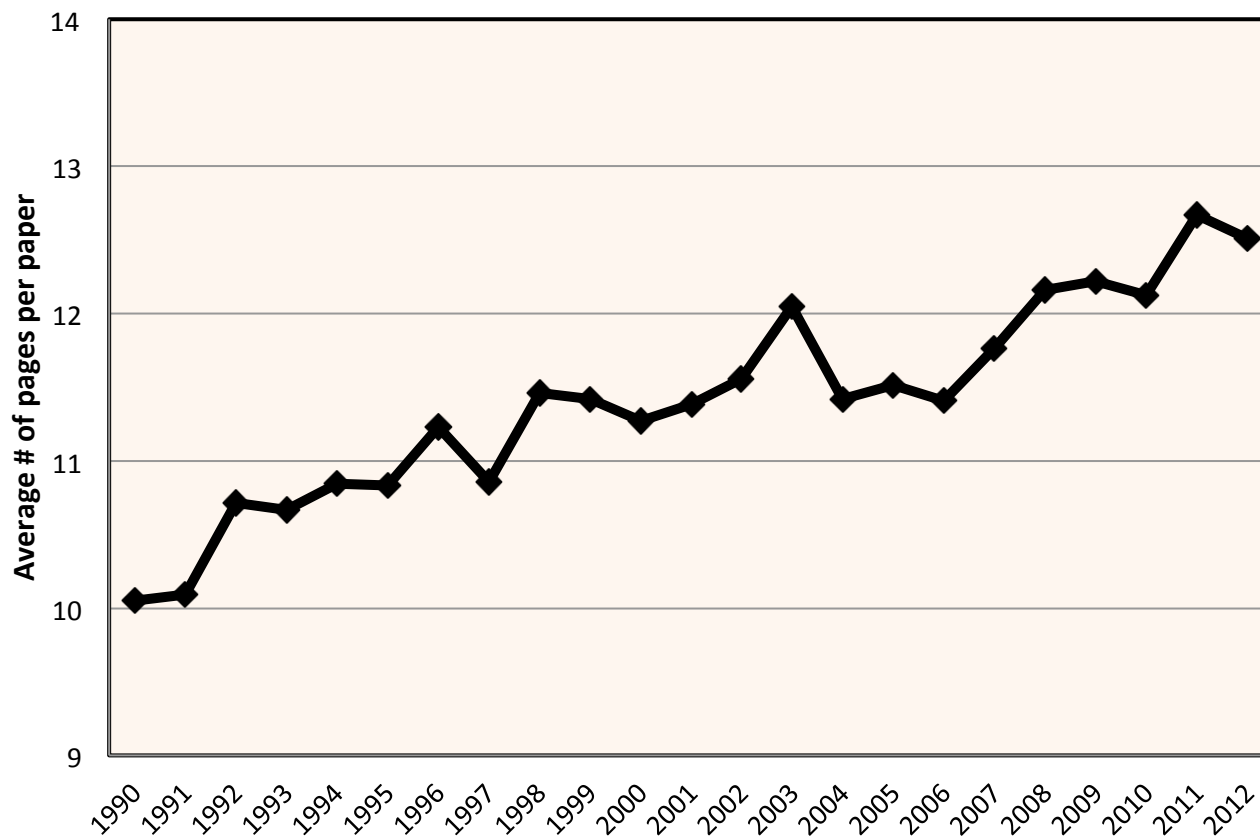
Figure 1. Percentage of ApJ main-journal papers written by a single author for each year during the period 1990 through 2012. Single-author papers are becoming increasingly rare.

Our goal is to receive the referee's report within 4 weeks of the referee accepting the chore.

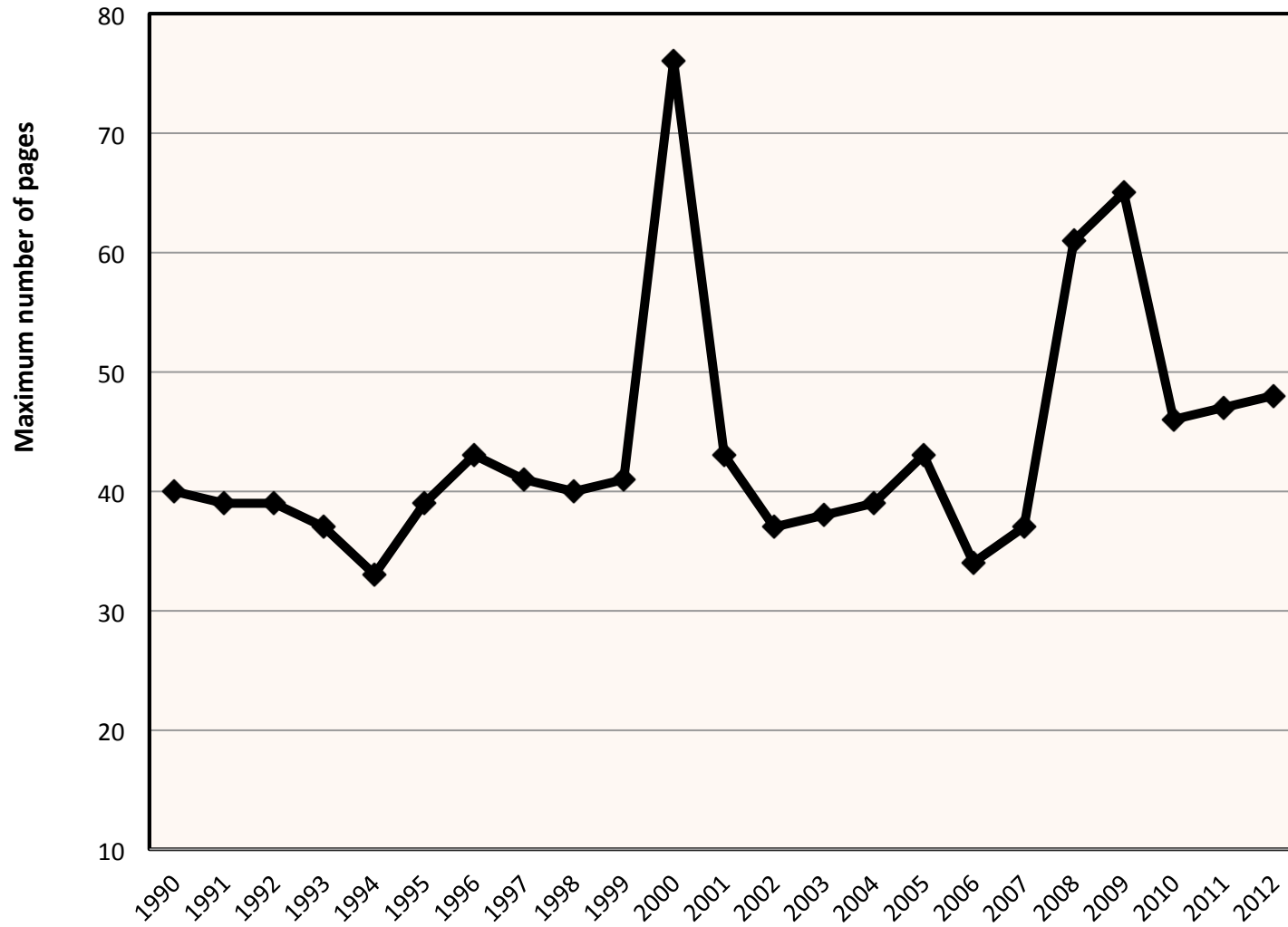
(Authors sometimes confuse the 4-week expectation with the date that their manuscript is submitted.)

Time budget, submission to decision...

Average number of pages per ApJ paper, Part 1



Maximum number of pages in an ApJ paper, Part 1



Referees remain anonymous, by default: the anonymity is robustly guarded.

If a referee waives the customary anonymity (and if the SE agrees) then direct correspondence between authors and referee is nevertheless discouraged.

The “Single Blind” policy ...

The author/referee interaction should be a positive one, and almost always is. (The SE is able to edit the referee report, and the author's reply.)

Responding to referee comments

- Read your referee report and put it away for a day!
- Read it again!
- Respond to each and every comment specifically
- It is helpful to editor and referee if changes in the text are highlighted in bold font
- Where you disagree, explain why
- If a referee misses a point it is not necessarily his/her fault, you may not have explained it as clearly as you think
- Be polite!
- Prepare a detailed covering letter with your response

How should an author wisely react
to a negative report from the
referee?

Goal of the peer-review process:
publication of a polished
manuscript clearly presenting
important science.

All submissions are revised at least
once.

Goal: reach closure after no more than 2 or 3 author/referee interactions.

If a stalemate is reached, the SE adjudicates, overriding a referee's recommendation occurs rarely.

Authors are obliged to respond to all concerns of the referee: if they do not agree with the referee they are obliged to give reasons. The process is “referee friendly.”

In the case of a stalemate, an author may request a second opinion. The SE considers this request after seeing the author's rebuttal, and, usually, after seeing the referee's reaction to the rebuttal.

If a second referee is sought, the new referee is sometimes informed of the nature of the impasse.

Referees are expected to deal with scientific issues; they are not to be burdened with corrections of the English.

But referees may flag a manuscript as needing substantial copy editing.



If your paper is accepted

- Great – celebrate!
- The journal will expect you to check your proofs rapidly and carefully
 - Give one copy of proofs to somebody else to read
 - Reply to copy editor's queries

Authors are rewarded for their efforts by the publication of their work.

Should referees be rewarded?

Should, or may, authors post their submissions on arXiv or astro-ph?
The policy of the ApJ is laissez-faire about pre-acceptance postings.
Postings after acceptance is encouraged.

Advantages of peer-reviewed manuscripts:

- = improved by the refereeing
 - = copy-edited
 - = type-set
- = archived in perpetuity