

Editorial

Message From the Incoming Editor-in-Chief

ON October 1 of this year, Prof. S. Hutchinson completed 14 years of editorial service—the five most recent years as an Editor-in-Chief—to the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON ROBOTICS (T-RO). By any measure, 14 years is a long time, especially if they happen to occupy the prime years of one's career. Thankfully, Prof. Hutchinson's reputation as an outstanding researcher remains undiminished, and his impeccable stewardship leaves the TRANSACTIONS in much better position today than five years ago. The journal's latest statistics firmly corroborate the standard of excellence, openness, and diversity that Prof. Hutchinson and his predecessors before him have worked so hard to establish at T-RO. I wish to convey my deepest gratitude to Prof. Hutchinson for his leadership and vision in guiding T-RO to its preeminent position today.

On January 5 of next year, Prof. G. Oriolo will also have completed five years of exemplary service as a Senior Editor to the TRANSACTIONS. To those who have worked with him, Prof. Oriolo embodies all the admirable virtues of an old school editor: punctual and dedicated, appropriately demanding and encouraging at times, and possessing a keen sense of what is most relevant in our rapidly evolving field. We are deeply indebted to Prof. Oriolo for his many years of dedicated service to the TRANSACTIONS.

Beginning my term as an Editor-in-Chief has given me pause to reflect on just what qualities set T-RO apart from the many other journals in our field. It may be tempting to point to our bibliometric indicators, but these alone are not entirely satisfying, as statistics can be ephemeral and, at best, tell only part of the story. In my mind, the most distinguishing quality of T-RO is that among the many robotics journals, we are run in the most democratic way. Our editors and associate editors are drawn from the most active robotics researchers throughout the world, and their expertise spans the entire spectrum of robotics research. All board members contribute significantly to our mission of reviewing papers; there are no honorary positions on our board. Our three-tiered organizational structure provides needed checks and balances and (on occasion) even allows for carefully reasoned minority opinions to prevail. I believe that when researchers contemplate where to submit their paper, they are reassured that at T-RO, their paper will get a fair shot.

As with any democratic institution, however, the TRANSACTIONS thrives only when its constituents participate actively and vigorously. At its most basic level, the mission of the TRANSACTIONS is a simple one: to publish the best research papers in robotics and to be the first choice of researchers as a forum for publishing their best work. Today, we are inundated by unfiltered research content from an endless stream of

sources, or worse, poorly filtered content that masquerades as curated research. The single most important function of T-RO is to present only content that has been subject to the careful scrutiny of our reviewers and editors. More than ever, we need to rely on our reviewers, associate editors, and editors to filter this content more carefully. We especially need to rely upon those who have published in T-RO and, thus, know first-hand the standards expected of its papers, to provide timely, quality reviews that ask hard questions but are also open to new ideas that may not always be consistent with one's own perspective or the status quo.

Given that the goal of T-RO is to publish the best research papers in robotics, this naturally begs the following question: What exactly is a good research paper? Usual qualities like originality and novelty, intellectual depth and thoroughness, and practical impact naturally come to mind. It also does not hurt to be occasionally reminded that technical correctness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a good paper, that gauging the impact of someone else's work often requires stepping away from one's own work, and that, in general, one should be wary of window dressing and superficial mathematics and any diversionary demonstrations or experiments.

Another understated but equally important hallmark of a good paper is writing quality. Naturally, it would not be reasonable to ask that we collectively elevate our writing to the level of researchers in, say, the humanities and social sciences. Besides, to paraphrase Maugham, "There are three basic rules to good writing. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." As a community, however, we can begin by recognizing that good research and good writing are complementary. For papers that meet T-RO's technical threshold, but whose presentation can be improved, our reviewers and editors may offer concrete suggestions to authors on how to improve the organization and writing quality of their paper. In many cases this may involve shortening the paper, as quite often less is more.

It is an exciting time to be a roboticist. I look forward to welcoming your submissions, and your suggestions on ways to improve the TRANSACTIONS.

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