Guidelines for Authors

Here are some criteria to keep in mind, listed in decreasing order of importance. These goals may sometimes conflict. For example, brevity may interfere with pedagogical effectiveness, and both may conflict with completeness. The balance among them is a matter of judgment and taste.

1. **Mathematical correctness.** Of course, you must avoid technical errors. Does every sentence make mathematical sense? Don't bluff or show off with mathematical terminology you only partly understand.

2. **Completeness.** Provide the information needed to follow the argument or calculation from beginning to end. Don't confuse an example with an adequate treatment of the general case. (This does not mean that an example is not desirable; see 4.)

3. **Organization.** Are things said in the best order? Is the flow of the logic clear? Is the reason for each step clear? Are the main ideas in danger of being obscured by the details?

4. **Pedagogical effectiveness.** Can you "go the extra mile" to help the reader understand? Examples and analogies can add clarity to an already logically complete discussion.

5. **Sentence structure and punctuation.** Is the paper written in sentences, and does every sentence make sense? Stamp out sentence fragments, run-ons, and dangling participles ("Adding x^2 to both sides, the answer becomes ... "). Leaving out or adding a comma can unintentionally change the meaning of the sentence. (Once famous example: "The Republican Party opposes any tax increase[,] which would harm the economy.") Etc. ...

6. **Brevity and style.** Trim out extra words, pointless repetition, and long transitional phrases that say nothing. Is pretentious language used where simpler language would do the job at least as well? Although mathematics seldom can read like a novel, some variety in word choice and sentence structure can stave off boredom.

7. **Grammar and spelling.**

8. **Neatness.** When asked to read something, you have a right to expect it to be legible. Few people can produce a good piece of formal writing without recopying the final draft.