Editorial: *Physical Review Letters* at 50

You may have noticed a small icon in the table of contents and elsewhere, a graphic that contains something about “PRL” and “50 years.” You may also be aware that the issue you are viewing now is the first issue of the 100th volume of *Physical Review Letters*, and that we publish two volumes per year. Together these serve notice that PRL will reach its 50th anniversary in the middle of 2008. We are naturally quite proud that the journal started by Sam Goudsmit in 1958 as an experiment has not merely survived, but has thrived for a half century. As described below, we will mark this occasion in several ways throughout the year, beginning this month, and invite our readers to join us.

In the journal itself we will print material that is somewhat outside the usual for PRL. Watch this space over the coming year for a series of Editorials, to appear approximately once per month. In the early days of PRL, the editors engaged more in discussion of the critical issues facing the journals, and facing scientific publishing generally, than has been our recent habit. We will reinvigorate such discussions over the course of the next 12 months, and offer Editorials that address the changing publication environment and our possible actions in response. Some will also include a look back at the issues facing PRL in its early days, and compare those to current concerns.

Watch this space also for a series of Essays, to be written by physicists who played a leading role in the physics world during PRL’s 50 years. They will cover research, publishing, and science policy—past, present, and even future. With the small exception of occasional Editorials, PRL has included nothing but accounts of physics research for 50 years. The Essays will broaden the content of the journal somewhat, and we hope will provide some insight into the impact of PRL on individual physicists and their careers, as well as on the broader community and on physics research itself.

External to the published journal, we plan sessions at various meetings within and outside the U.S. These will include presentations both about the history of the journal itself and about the history of the physics that has been reported in its pages. Each session will be accompanied by a reception, which we hope will provide a means for us to thank authors and referees for their contributions, and also to obtain input from the community about the present state of the journal. Details about these are available on our website: <http://prl.aps.org/50years>.

We also plan to present additional material online. One item that we hope will be of particular interest will be a timeline of events associated with PRL. This will begin over 100 years ago, with the birth of *The Physical Review*, and will include links to descriptions of various events in publishing and in physics research, and also in the world at large, for context. Also online we will feature each week during the course of 2008 a few Letters published in each year of PRL’s existence, milestones along the way, beginning in the first week of January with papers published in 1958.

Our principal motivation for the activities described above is what drives any study of history: the past can inform the present, and can make a valuable contribution to plans for the future. Scientific research, scientific publishing, and indeed publishing in general have undergone dramatic and rapid changes over the past 50 years. The number of physicists worldwide grew, as did the number of published papers, and research became more international. Technological changes, beginning with machine data processing, revolutionized publication, a process that continues now. As these and other changes took place, Sam Goudsmit, George Trigg, and their colleagues faced many issues similar to those we face today. We hope that a consideration of the challenges they met, and the way they met them, will assist us in planning the next 50 years of *Physical Review Letters*.

Reinhardt Schuhmann
Managing Editor

Published 2 January 2008

DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevLett.100.010001](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.100.010001)

PACS numbers: 01.30.-y, 01.10.-m, 01.65.+g