From the Editor

Rapid Changes

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This month marks a new chapter for *BioTechniques*, the launch of a new, online-only publishing track we are calling *BioTechniques Rapid Dispatches* (biotechniques.com/rd). Through *Rapid Dispatches*, we hope to speed up the publishing process, while at the same time expand the universe of methods-related articles that we offer our readers.

So, how will *Rapid Dispatches* differ from our print journal? First, it is important to note that *Rapid Dispatches* is another publishing track for *BioTechniques* authors; our print journal is not changing its style or format and articles appearing in the print journal will not appear in *Rapid Dispatches* and vice versa. But there are several obvious advantages that an online-only format offers authors and readers to meet their needs: the ability to publish articles within days of acceptance, the opportunity for authors to expand on their discussion and materials presented, and the opportunity for us to publish methods from a much broader range of scientific disciplines. Initially, we anticipate publishing two to three *Rapid Dispatches* articles per week.

The article style and format for *Rapid Dispatches* will be slightly different from our print articles moving forward. To highlight these differences, we have re-printed exclusively, in this issue of *BioTechniques*, one of the first *Rapid Dispatches* Reports on page 335. I think the most noticeable differences for readers at first glance should be our inclusion of category/subject tabs at the top of each page for improved indexing and a new “Method Summary” section located at the bottom of the first page.

We have established 25 different method subject categories — from genomics to evolution/ecology methods — that are intended to serve as guideposts to readers to quickly find those methods and techniques particularly suited to their fields of study. Articles submitted for consideration at *Rapid Dispatches* are assigned into one or more of these categories by the authors. Once accepted for publication, articles will be highlighted on the main page of the *Rapid Dispatches* website for up to two weeks before being indexed into their specific subject areas. All subject categories are visible on *Rapid Dispatches* articles as either hyperlinks in the online files or as tabs in PDF versions.

While indexing similar methods and techniques together in sections will enable researchers to find those new approaches most

applicable to their work, what about methods that cut across disciplines? Is there a fast way to see if any particular article might be applicable to your field of work? To address this concern, we came up with the idea of the “Method Summary” section. The “Method Summary” is a very brief — 100 words or less in most cases — summary focused exclusively on the methodology used and its potential applications. Our purpose with this method summary is to provide readers with a very quick overview of the method itself — an overview that includes enough information to determine whether or not that particular method will be relevant to your work. While some might argue that this is the purpose of the abstract, the “Method Summary” strips away any discussion and references to validating data, presenting only a description of the method itself in its purest form; interested readers can then download the entire article, along with all validating data and discussion, to determine how they would like to implement the new approach.

These changes might seem minor to some, but each goes toward our core goal in starting *Rapid Dispatches*: rapid dissemination of a wider variety of methods and techniques through a single, globally accessible outlet. With more methods-oriented articles appearing in the scientific literature, we felt there was a growing need for a single location where interested scientists could go to find reports on new methods, techniques, and reviews. For our authors, *Rapid Dispatches* will enable their work to impact the scientific community faster than ever before, and our readers will now have a one-stop “methods hub” featuring a much broader range of methods along with a structure that will assist in finding relevant content.

This is only the starting point for *Rapid Dispatches*; over the coming months you will see additional enhancements as we push forward with this new publishing track. I hope that you will take the time to look at the new website, download an article or two of interest, and even consider submitting your methods manuscripts in the future.

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