

International Journal of Remote Sensing

Advice to Guest Editors of Special Issues

These notes have been prepared for the benefit of those who are thinking of proposing a topic for a special issue of the *International Journal of Remote Sensing (IJRS)* and acting as guest editors for a special issue.

#1. Background - Special issues of the *International Journal of Remote Sensing*

The Editors and the Publishers of the *International Journal of Remote Sensing* are very keen to publish special issues from time to time. A special issue comprises a set of articles devoted to some particular topic in remote sensing that is timely in the development of the subject. These articles may arise out of a specialist meeting or they may be invited or solicited and collected by a proposed guest editor (or guest editors – we use the singular in what follows).

#2. The guest editor of a special issue.

The complete editorial process for a special issue is handled by a guest editor who assumes responsibility for soliciting/inviting the papers, receiving the papers, acknowledging receipt of the papers, submitting the papers to referees, communicating the reports of the referees to the authors, making decisions on acceptance, revision or rejection of papers, collecting all the papers together and finally transferring the edited accepted papers to the Editorial Office. The responsibility for the scientific integrity of the papers is that of the guest editor – it is his/her academic reputation, in the first instance, which is on the line when the material is published. No further refereeing or (scientific) editorial work should be necessary once the papers have been transmitted to the Editorial Office. We should add the caveat that the Editors-in-Chief have final authority to accept or reject a paper if needs be; this only happens *extremely* rarely but this provision is necessary for legal reasons.

#3. Proposing a special issue.

There is no formal procedure for proposing a special issue. Anyone interested in doing so should simply contact the Editor-in-chief and indicate

- (a) the topic proposed for the special issue
- (b) the name(s) of the proposed guest editor(s)
- (c) the background and justification for the topic proposed
- (d) Whether or not it is based on a conference and, if so, when and where it is to be held, the size of recent events, the nationalities etc. involved. Proposing a special issue *after* a conference has been held is generally too late,
- (e) If a special issue arises out of a conference it is very important to realise that a special issue cannot – for all sorts of reasons – include *verbatim* reprints of papers that have already appeared in a hard copy, CD or flash disk Proceedings. The special issue paper should be different, giving a more comprehensive discussion of the work, perhaps including some later work or adding some elaboration of the text arising out of discussions at the conference

and so on. It will be necessary for a guest editor to be aware of copyright questions here too.

(f) the estimated timescale for the delivery of the complete set of edited papers.

#4. Editing a special issue.

A guest editor is encouraged to use the Journal's Manuscript Central™ website:

<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tres>

(referred to as MC for short) but this is not mandatory. MC is a very powerful system and enables everything to be “paperless”; communications with authors, referees, etc. are all done by email and articles are submitted, transmitted to referees, revised etc., etc electronically. Guest editors can be given associate editor status in MC. It has to be acknowledged that there is quite a steep learning curve for using MC as an editor – it is a very powerful software package; however there are online training and support and resources available on the website. But guest editors need not use MC if they do not want to do so.

The advantages of using MC, in addition to its being entirely electronic, is that guest editors then have access to the Journal's entire database of referees whose interests can be identified from keywords and there are various tools to monitor progress in the editorial and refereeing operation. If it is decided to use MC then, as soon as a paper is submitted by an author, Catherine Murray (the *IJRS* Administrator) will perform some very basic checks and point out style errors, such as numeric references and citations and embedded figures and tables so that these problems can be resolved by the author before the paper is assigned to a guest editor.

#5. Refereeing of articles.

The role of a (guest) editor is, primarily, to assess, with the advice of referees, whether a paper is suitable scientifically for publication in the *International Journal of Remote Sensing*. An editor operates with the *advice* of referees. Some referees do not understand this and think that they are required to make decisions, whereas in fact they are asked to make recommendations; it is editors who make decisions. Editors *usually* follow the recommendations of referees but sometimes – for various reasons – we do not. Editors and publishers are not *guaranteeing* the scientific correctness of an article; that remains the responsibility of an author and anything that is published is always open to challenge in a later publication. We are asserting that the material is relevant to the subject area of the Journal and that, as far as we can tell, proper scientific method has been applied in the study that is being reported.

#6. The length of a special issue.

At present an issue of the Journal should come to 288 printed pages. As a rough rule of thumb the number of printed pages occupied by an article is about $(4/7)$ x the number of double-spaced A4 pages, including text, references list, tables and figures. A special issue can deviate in length to some extent from 312 pages, say by 10-20% either way. If it is a lot larger then it can be a double issue – ideally 576 pages, again with flexibility of, say about 20% either way.

#7. Shortfall.

Occasionally a proposed special issue only generates, say, half a dozen accepted papers which would come to around only 100 pages or so. In that case the papers can still be published – and they can still be published together as a group, maybe along with other related “regular” papers that are in the system at that stage – but they would only constitute part of an issue.

#8. Schedules.

One problem facing guest editors is that articles are submitted over a period, the time involved in the refereeing and revision of articles varies a lot and some papers are inevitably ready for press long before others and there are usually some stragglers. In fairness to those who have adhered to the guest editors’ schedule there comes a time when it is necessary to make a cut off; any papers that are, in principle, acceptable but fail to meet deadlines for the special issue can usually be published later on in a regular issue.

#9. Letters, book reviews, errata, etc.

We normally do not publish Letters, book reviews or errata in special issues. There is, however, no arbitrary lower (or indeed upper) limit imposed on articles; in considering whether the length of an article is appropriate or not the considerations should be entirely scientific.

#10. Run ons.

Sometimes, for instance if a special issue arises out of a conference or workshop, the sponsors of the meeting may wish to purchase run-on copies of the special issue and the publishers are happy to quote a price for this; special covers can also be provided for such run ons.

#11. Journal style and format.

At the outset authors should be strongly encouraged to follow the Journal’s *Instructions for Authors* and the *Further Notes on Style* which will be found on the Journal’s website. However, many authors fail to do that completely. One serious problem that we have – and our impression is that it has got a lot worse in recent years – is that once a paper has been “accepted” there are more and more papers coming through the system with serious problems remaining. These problems fall into two categories involving (a) poor English, and/or (b) the *Instructions for Authors* and the *Further Notes on Style* not having been followed by the authors.

With regard to English, the Taylor and Francis copy editors can cope with that; provided the *meaning* is clear they can correct the English, though it does have to be borne in mind that the copy editors are not usually experts in remote sensing and may not even be scientists by training. **We do not expect that either referees or guest editors should spend time working on correcting the English of manuscripts.**

There are a number of ways in which authors frequently fail to follow the *Instructions for Authors* and the *Further Notes on Style*. We have appended below a list of some of the most common problems that we encounter (though there are others).

Experience with articles submitted to this Journal shows that very few papers are accepted without any alteration in the form in which they are originally submitted. If they are not rejected outright they go back to the authors for revision. *If an editor or guest editor notices flagrant failure to follow the rules (particularly the points mentioned in the appendix below) and draws the attention of authors to their specific failures when a revision/resubmit decision email is sent out that can save a lot of difficulties later on and speed up the publication process quite a lot.*

We don't want you to spend a lot of your valuable time on the checking that we are proposing, but we think it need not take very long – you can very quickly gain an impression of whether, in general, the rules have been well followed or not.

#12. Transmitting material for a special issue to the Editorial Office.

If you are using MC then once you have accepted a paper it will go into a holding area until all the papers for the special issue are ready for onward transmission to the Publishers. If you are editing the papers outside MC then you should send everything to the Editorial Office all in one parcel which contains the following:

- (a) For each paper, one hard copy of the entire paper, one extra hard copy of the title and abstract page and a WORD file.
- (b) A title page for the special issue, showing the title of the issue and the name(s) of the guest editor(s) exactly as you would wish to see it (them) printed.
- (c) A cover image. This may simply be a figure from one of the papers in the special issue or it may be some other appropriate image. In the latter case there should also be a descriptive text supplied, with a note that the image is to be printed inside the issue as well as on the cover (so that it is not lost if people strip off the covers of their issues when binding the Journal copies).
- (d) A preface (see below #13)
- (e) A short running title that will be used as a common headline for the right-hand pages of all the papers in the special issue
- (f) The running order, i.e. the sequence in which you wish to see the papers printed in the special issue.

#13 The Preface.

When you prepare the preface, please take on board the following advice from Prof. Giles Foody, Editor-in-Chief:-

“The preface need not be long but should provide general background information on the special issue. Critically, it should provide a general overview of the subject covered and refer to each paper in the issue (the papers should be cited normally in the text and included in a list of references at the end of the editorial/preface - the

publishers will be able to add the details on page numbers at the final stages of production etc). This will help to ensure that readers understand the background to the special issue and the contributions made by the articles it contains.”

#14. Production Schedule

Once your material has been transmitted to the Editorial Office it will be checked and you will be advised of any flagrant breaches by authors of the *Instructions for Authors* and the *Further Notes on Style* and you will be asked to transmit to the authors the request for replacement or additional material. Once any such replacement material has been received for all the papers, the papers will be passed on to the Production Department of Taylor & Francis and we aim to publish the special issue about 6 months after that. This assumes that all authors check their proofs quickly.

The guest editor will be given access to the proofs of the papers once they have been typeset. This is not for detailed proof correction because that remains the responsibility of the authors; it is merely to enable the guest editor to identify any obvious errors in the typesetting.

Giles Foody
Arthur Cracknell
September 2008

Appendix.

Summary of some of the commonest errors.

- The references list contains incomplete references.
- Scalar variables should be in italics, vectors, matrices and tensors should be as in section 6.8 of the *Further Notes on Style*. If something is used as a mathematical variable which is used in equations it should be denoted by a *single (italic) character*, with subscripts or superscripts or arguments in brackets and not as things like “NDVI”, “chl”, etc. Subscripts and superscripts should follow the same rule. * should only be used to indicate a complex conjugate and should not be used to indicate (implied) multiplication in an expression or equation. If it is necessary to indicate multiplication explicitly in an expression or equation then the conventional multiplication sign “x” should be used. And so on.
- Figures should be of a quality suitable for the printer to use; graphs should be properly labelled with “variables (units)” on both axes; maps etc. should have geographical coordinates attached (or some other identification of location plus a scale bar); density-sliced type figures should include a greyscale or colour wedge and so on.

- *All* variables should be defined, even if it seems obvious that '*x*' refers to a coordinate, *T* to temperature etc.
- Variables used in tables and figures should be written *exactly* as they are written in text.
- Scale bars should be labelled according to the usual conventions for SI units: i.e. 'km' or 'm', not 'Km', 'KM', 'M' etc. Also note spacing in units such as $W\ m^{-2}$ etc.
- If several similar figures or tables are included, try to use consistent fonts, line styles, scale bars, symbols etc.
- Abbreviations/acronyms used in tables and figures are only acceptable if they have previously been defined in the text or, if this is the first use, they are defined in the accompanying caption.
- Figure and table captions should be sufficient to explain what the figure or table shows but if an extensive explanation is required, include the detailed explanation in the main text instead.
- Avoid use of all capitals in figures and tables. Generally, apart from proper names and units where necessary, it looks better if only the first letter of axis labels, legend labels etc. is capitalised.