

EDITORIAL

A focus on scope

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One of the roles of the Editor-in-Chief (along with the team of Academic Editors and the in-house Executive Editor) is to explain and clarify the scope of the journal. What range of subjects should we cover, what should the criteria be for deciding to publish a paper, and what types and styles of article can be considered? This is, of course, an inexact art, as every article is unique and however carefully we try to specify criteria, we can't cover every eventuality. Nevertheless, we do our best, as it is helpful to authors when deciding where to submit their paper, to referees offering their advice on the suitability of a study and to readers who want to know what to expect in a journal. Importantly, for a journal such as *Development*, which plays a central role in the field, what we publish influences what is considered to be developmental biology.

As the field changes, the scope of *Development* evolves. This is the result of the ongoing dialogue between authors, editors, advisory board, referees and readers who comment on submitted, reviewed and published papers. Periodically we need to take stock and codify these changes. We have recently done this and you can see the results in our updated Aims and Scope (dev.biologists.org/content/aims). We don't expect anything on this page to be surprising or unfamiliar to readers of *Development*, but we hope the revisions reflect how our field is changing, as well as simplify and make clear the breadth of studies we cover. The aim of *Development* remains to publish the best research in any and all areas of plant and animal development. This extends to studies of regeneration and to work using stem cells. As always, the principal criteria for acceptance of a paper remain scientific excellence and rigour, determined by our cadre of academic editors, with advice from the advisory board and referees.

We publish several types of papers. To help readers and authors navigate our journal, alongside the research articles and reports in the main section of the journal we have several specialist sections. For almost a decade, we have included a section for studies focused on stem cells and regeneration. More recently, prompted by the resurgence in interest, we introduced a section to highlight papers investigating human development. *Development* has been pleased to encourage this field by hosting dedicated conferences and commissioning special content; we are proud of the reputation *Development* is building for publishing cutting-edge human developmental biology.

Although the majority of our research articles and reports pose and empirically test hypotheses, we also publish a small number of theoretical papers. There is a long history of theory contributing to progress in our field and we are happy to continue this tradition by publishing studies that use computational or mathematical methods to address developmental biology problems (for a recent example of

such a study, see Ziebell et al., 2018). As with experimental papers, theoretical studies must be relevant to the field and offer significant new insight. Conscious that many of our readers are less familiar with these approaches, we also insist that theoretical papers are written so that they are accessible to a broad audience.

Complementing the research papers, ten years ago we introduced a section for papers describing techniques and resources. This section allows authors to describe new methods that will be of broad interest and use to the field, and to describe datasets or other types of resources that will be important to developmental biology. Papers in this section are among our most read and cited, and cover topics ranging from genome engineering and genomics to imaging (see, for example, Choi et al., 2018, Masselink et al., 2019 and Matsushima et al., 2018). The increasing importance of technology and 'big data' – whether in the form of genomics, single cell approaches or high throughput imaging – means that we are anticipating more of these type of papers in the future. We have updated the Aims and Scope to indicate that these studies are welcome in *Development* and we encourage interested authors to submit work that fits the criteria. The main criterion we use to assess manuscripts in this category is that they will be of major value to the developmental biology community. As with all papers in *Development*, datasets and resources must be made available to the community with minimal restrictions upon publication.

The Techniques and Resources section also houses papers that aren't necessarily methods or datasets but nonetheless we think will be of significant use to the field and appreciated by readers. Examples might include developmental atlases and databases, or computational methods and software relevant to the field. Another, and different, example of a paper that fits this bracket can be seen in the current issue (Mulas et al., 2019). This paper provides detailed experimental protocols for the propagation and differentiation of mouse embryonic stem cells (ESCs). These are techniques that many labs, including those with limited experience of ESC culture, have been adopting. We recognise that the style and content of this paper is a departure for us, but we hope that providing detailed methods will prove useful and contribute to the improved reproducibility and reliability of research using these approaches. We expect to publish this type of article only on rare occasions, when it will be of outstanding utility to the community and there is a clear demand for it. We would be interested in suggestions of subjects for which this might be the case, and would encourage authors that are considering the submission of such a paper to enquire first as to potential suitability.

Turning from research content to what, in journal circles, is known as front matter, *Development* continues to publish various types of reviews, commentaries and features. The vast majority of these articles are commissioned, but please do let us know if there is a topic that you would like to see covered, perhaps something we've missed or a hypothesis you would like to discuss. For both long and shorter reviews, we try to identify subjects at the forefront of the field and allow authors to introduce and synthesise new insights with existing knowledge. In response to feedback from the

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community, we have also started publishing more commentaries and feature articles. These include interviews with authors, opinion pieces from researchers in the field and articles – such as those in our Advocating Developmental Biology series – that promote or explore the field. Our aim is that front matter is not only useful and interesting but also entertaining and provocative. Your views on this are always welcome.

Whether you are a cover-to-cover reader or an occasional browser, we hope you find the content of *Development* to your liking and presented in an accessible way. And if you're thinking of submitting a paper to us, but are not sure whether it is within our scope, please send us a presubmission enquiry, or better yet a link to the preprint. We will read these and endeavour to give you a rapid answer.

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