Editorial

The numbering of things

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The numbering of archival scientific journal articles is a surprisingly complicated subject. This is both more true and less true in the age of digital, online publications. It is more true because in addition to the classical numerical identifiers of year, volume, issue, and page, we now have the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) and DOI (Digital Object Identifier). Furthermore, some journals, including the Journal of Vision, have added an article number to the list of identifiers. But identifying a unique article is simpler in the digital age than in the past if that article makes use of the DOI. This is a unique string that in principle identifies a particular article. In the Journal of Vision, each article is identified by a DOI. For example, one recent article has the DOI: 10.1167/6.9.1. In the future, we may hope that all scientific journals will ensure that each article, and citation, includes a DOI, and we may further hope that search and indexing services will make consistent use of this information.

But until that day, we are obliged to continue to number and group articles in more or less conventional ways. Since launching, the Journal of Vision has numbered pages in a fashion that is traditional in many journals: page numbers increase sequentially throughout the year. This leads to a number of complications. In particular, it is difficult to prepare multiple papers in advance, and it is difficult to arrange parallel publication of special issues (Watson, 2006). But beyond these practical difficulties, annual pagination violates the spirit of the numbering hierarchy that is observed elsewhere in the Journal of Vision. As reflected in our URL, DOI, and Table of Contents, we follow a hierarchy that descends from volume, to issue, to article, with issues sequenced within a year, and articles sequenced within an issue. A practical and logical solution to the difficulties noted above is to sequence page numbers within an article. With this new volume 7, we inaugurates this new page numbering scheme. All articles will begin on page one, with a final page number that reflects the length of the article. This enhances the notion, subscribed to by the Journal of Vision, that the article is the primary unit of publication, and that volumes and issues are organizing conveniences, but no more.

The only complication that is introduced by this scheme is that volume and page number, by themselves, no longer uniquely identify an article within the journal. This may cause a problem for some antiquated search services which assume such uniqueness. But we are confident that such problems are transient and localized. And in the longer term, as noted above, we expect increasing use of the DOI to index and search for individual articles.

In conjunction with this change, we have made a few small modifications to the visual appearance of each article. In the PDF version of the article, on all pages after the first, the leftmost header item now includes the issue number and article number, as well as year and volume. For example, in the first paper of this new year, the header is “Journal of Vision (2007) 7(1):1, 1–16.” The number following the colon is the article number. In addition, the complete article citation is provided on the first page of the PDF, beneath the abstract and keywords, as in the example on this page.

The Journal of Vision will continue to innovate and evolve. This is one small step in that process.

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