UBIQUITY EDITOR'S FAQ

Prepared by Peter J. Denning, Editor-in-Chief

(updated February 26, 2015)

Q. What are the editorial objectives of *Ubiquity*?

Ubiquity is ACM's peer-reviewed Web-based magazine devoted to the future of computing and the people who are creating it. See
http://ubiquity.acm.org/about_ubiquity.cfm

Ubiquity is similar to *First Monday* in being peer reviewed and online, but different in being concerned with the future of computing rather than just the Internet.

Q. How does *Ubiquity* interact with CACM?

Ubiquity is included under the umbrella of the CACM online. It is linked to the CACM online page, which occasionally pulls *Ubiquity* articles as features on the CACM page.

Q. What is the relationship between *Ubiquity* and other ACM publications? Where does it fit in that spectrum?

ACM has a large spectrum of publications (see http://acm.org/publications).
Ubiquity is an ACM magazine.

Q. Are *Ubiquity* articles commissioned, invited, or simply evaluated after submission?

Ubiquity handles four kinds of articles and a blog. Articles are solicited, unsolicited, editor-contributed, and interviews. Solicited articles are invited by editors, for example, with a *Ubiquity* symposium. Unsolicited article are offered by their authors through Manuscript Central without editor action. Editor-contributed articles are written by editors in their roles as contributing editors. Interviews are conducted by

1

editors in written form. All items are evaluated by the panel of associate editors with a final publish decision by the Editor-in-Chief (EIC).

Q. What tricks or techniques are recommended for developing potential articles?

Look for authors who offer new perspectives and useful interpretations about the future. Get them to write or be interviewed on a topic. We are looking for high quality writing from observers who see things most of the rest of us do not. Editors who organize symposia necessarily do this when deciding whom to invite to write for a symposium.

Q. How many articles are published a month?

The steady state goal is one new item a week, including blog posts. We need active editor involvement to maintain this flow.

Q. How are submitted articles evaluated? Is this a reviewed or refereed publication?

We are a peer-reviewed publication. The editor panel does most of the reviewing, with occasional help from outside experts. We use the Manuscript Central (MC) system at mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ubiquity. It is customized for *Ubiquity* and permits editors to view submissions on line and provide their comments online. Comments by any editor are visible to all the editors; this expedites review by allowing editors to skip over comments that have already been made. MC automatically incorporates the reviewer comments (anonymously) into the decision letters.

Q. What is the historical acceptance rate?

Fewer than 10 percent of the unsolicited articles submitted since 2008 have been accepted. Almost all the articles invited for symposia have been published after suitable revisions.

Q. What are the requirements of a submission? Are these requirements evaluated by the Editor-in-Chief or by the Associate Editor assigned to the submission?

The general requirements for an article are (1) align with the *Ubiquity* mission, (2) do not exceed 2,500 words. However, at editor discretion, we accept items up to 5,000 words. See the submission guidelines at http://ubiquity.acm.org/submissions.cfm.

Q. How long should *Ubiquity* articles be?

Normally 2,500 words max, but up to 5,000 words at editor's discretion.

Q. Are submitted articles evaluated by the editor who invited the submission?

All items regardless of origin are run through the editor review process. We aim for turnaround within two weeks. For an invited article, the inviting editor normally handles the review process. Managing the review process means watching MC until enough reviews are posted that a decision is possible, and then making a decision using the MC tools.

Q. Is there an expectation of acceptance of invited submissions?

There is a bias toward acceptance, but not a foregone conclusion. The editors should only invite when they think the author has something useful to say and can say it with quality writing. The review process then helps the author sharpen the argument and improve the quality of the item. On rare occasions, the invited author won't be able to satisfy the panel of editors and the article is not published.

Q. Of what form(s) are articles allowed? Interview, opinion, summary of something else, original research, obituary?

We are looking for grounded reflections and interpretations of the future of computing. These tend to be personal commentaries with adequate grounding offered to support the arguments. An obituary can be appropriate if it helps us see something about the future from a review of the person's life; the obituary page in

each issue of *The Economist* is a good model. We do not deal with original research papers, pure tutorials, or book reviews. However, tutorial material might be included in an analysis of a future, and a book might be reviewed as part of analysis of the future.

Q. **For interviews, who is the interviewer?**

Any editor can conduct an interview. There is a certain art to it because the questions and answers are built online through a series of iterations of the interview document. The iteration process usually converges within five rounds. A good place to start is to look at a *Ubiquity* interview as a model.

Q. **What stylistic conventions hold? Should the article be in traditional scientific prose (passive voice, third person, dispassionate, technical)?**

The articles are usually the commentary and interpretation of the author. We therefore encourage active voice and first person. We discourage the dry passive form of research writing.

Q. **How many articles should be invited, evaluated, or reviewed by each editor each year?**

Each editor is asked to take responsibility to see at least two items into publication each year. That responsibility can be fulfilled by (1) writing the article yourself as contributing editor, (2) inviting an article, (3) interviewing somebody, or (4) grabbing an unsolicited article in MC and taking charge of the review process until it completes with publication.

Q. **What is the expected evaluation interval?**

We ask editors to check in at MC once a week and provide reviews of articles in their domain of expertise. We would like to have 3 or 4 reviews posted within two weeks, which is normally enough for the editor to make a decision and provide feedback to the author. Editors occasionally consult with outside experts as needed.

The objective is to make a decision within two weeks of submission. We cannot control how long authors take in revision cycles, but we can render our editorial decisions and guidance fairly rapidly in most cases.

Q. How should Manuscript Central be utilized during the evaluation of a submission?

MC is our primary tool for tracking and evaluation. All items (solicited, unsolicited, interview) should be registered there and made available for all editors to provide input.

Q. Who makes the final acceptance decision?

The editor in charge of an item; this is typically the inviting editor or the editor-in-chief. The EIC will assign unsolicited items to individual editors. Items submitted by editors themselves are reviewed by the panel and the EIC makes the decision.

Q. Are accepted articles copyedited? What is the production process and timeline after acceptance?

We do not copyedit. A format editor makes sure that an accepted item conforms to *Ubiquity* standard formats. Publication can happen fairly quickly after acceptance; the main delays are authors signing the copyright form and the format editor converting to the *Ubiquity* format. If there is a publication queue the time to publication will depend on the queue length. The managing editor will maintain the publication queue as a list of forthcoming items.

Q. How should authors cite their articles?

There are two ways. One is to directly link to the article at ubiquity.acm.org for example http://ubiquity.acm.org/article.cfm?id=1455706. The other is to use the ACM digital object identifier (DOI) for an item, which is included with the article and can be found through a standard DL search. The DL page also contains a link "ACM ref" that returns a complete properly formatted bibliographic citation string.

Q. What is a symposium?

A *Ubiquity* symposium is a collection of articles on a theme. Past examples have been "What is computation?" and "The Singularity." The purpose is to explore an emerging topic from many perspectives, to assist readers develop their own perspectives of the topic. Proposals to organize symposia are reviewed by the editorial panel to assess likely reader interest. The organizer writes an opening statement and invites 10-15 authors to write on the topic. When all the articles are in, the organizer writes a closing statement summarizing what has been learned. The symposium items are published once a week until the symposium is finished. It usually takes about 9-12 months from the time of the first proposal until the start of publication. The editor panel reviews symposia article drafts to get recommendations for improvement to the authors. See http://ubiquity.acm.org/organizesymposium.cfm

Q. What is the Blog@Ubiquity?

The *Ubiquity* blog began in March 2015 and posts blog posts weekly. A blog post is a reflection on something happening now that may significantly affect the future of computing. We ask our bloggers to state a claim and ground it with appropriate argument and evidence. We have a group of bloggers who have agreed to contribute at least two blog posts a year and do so whenever they are ready. Others who want to post contact the blog editor for a ruling on whether the proposed post fits the *Ubiquity* mission and is a well-grounded presentation of a viewpoint. The blog editor maintains a sufficient pool of regular bloggers to sustain the weekly flow. The editors monitor reader reactions to blog posts. Posts that garner strong interest signal that a longer article or interview on that topic would interest readers. Persistent themes in blog posts or reader comments may signal the value of a symposium on that theme. The editors expect the blog to be a main driver of the topics covered by *Ubiquity*.

Q. What about the monthly editor calls?

All *Ubiquity* editors are invited to a conference call every first Thursday of every month at 11:00 am Eastern time. The Editor-in-Chief distributes an agenda. The editors help with strategic directions and evaluate analytics data on what interests readers. Editors are expected to join at least 9 calls a year

Q. How does someone become an editor?

Persons interested in becoming editors can contact any existing editor or the senior editor at ACM to make their interest known. Before making an appointment, we look for evidence that the person can write and evaluate well, as described in the questions above. For a new person without much demonstrated experience, we begin by asking them to write a blog or an article and take it from there. We would like to maintain a panel size of about two dozen editors to maintain the flow of one new item published a week. The *Ubiquity* page contains an invitation to people who want to be come editors http://ubiquity.acm.org/becomeaneditor.cfm

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by Author, Affiliation

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About the Author
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