

Why Are There So Many Papers?*

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As an associate editor for several journals, I have developed a new superstition: opening a manuscript system seems to summon another paper to be sent my way. It feels like one arrives while I am assigning another; two more arrive while a referee declines. At this point, I am handling so many manuscripts across so many journals that I am ashamed to admit I can no longer remember the status of each one. Other editors and referees must be feeling the same way... Please tell me I am not alone.

The statistics suggest that this is not merely superstition. While arXiv is not a perfect proxy for journal submissions, its monthly figures show the scale of the growth. Across all subject areas, the number of month submissions to arXiv rose from 155,866 in 2019 to 284,486 in 2025. Much of that growth is recent: the annual total increased by 53 percent between 2022 and 2025 alone.¹ ArXiv is now receiving more than 800 papers each day. An eye-watering amount. There is a similar trend among math submissions (see figure) with a sharp tick upward in 2026.

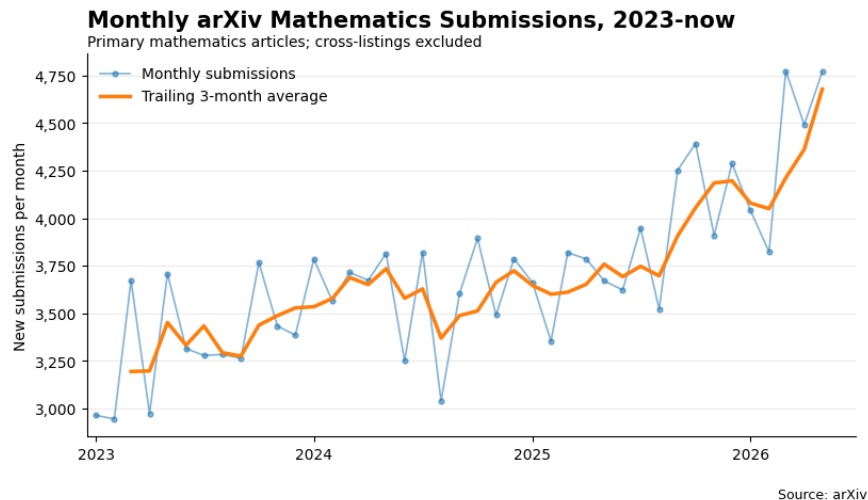
More papers are not necessarily a bad thing. More good papers would be excellent, and would signal a growing, healthy academic community. It is also encouraging that SIAM reports an increase of roughly 80 percent in article downloads since 2020, with a SIAM article now downloaded every 19 seconds.² The world is writing more, and we are downloading more.

My worry is that although the cost of producing and distributing a paper has fallen, the cost of

*Nick Trefethen, Why Have SIAM Journal papers Grown So Long?, SIAM News, August 2015. Nick's letter to the editor inspired the title of this one.

¹See the arXiv math submission numbers for 2019 (<https://arxiv.org/year/math/2019>) and 2025 (<https://arxiv.org/year/math/2025>). ArXiv doesn't separate out math and applied math.

²Kivmars Bowling, "SIAM Publications: Ensuring Trust, Quality, and Accessibility," *SIAM News*, January 2026.



reading one has not. That asymmetry is becoming an issue. Referee capacity has surely not risen by anything like 50 percent over the same period. Every submission creates work for an editor and several prospective referees, many of whom must be asked before two agree. Even after two agree, a few reminder emails are often needed before the reports arrive. It seems that the scarce resource is our attention, and valuable work risks being lost in the noise.

What is driving the increase? I would like to think that it reflects a larger, more active, and more international research community. If so, the strain may be manageable: the larger community can support more specialized journals and supply the researchers needed to judge the work. But because the increase is so sudden, it is probably due to the new tools that make papers so much easier to produce. I do not see the trend slowing any time soon, and it is hard to imagine what peer review will look like if submissions to individual journals double or triple.

If applied mathematics is becoming extraordinarily efficient at producing papers, how do we become equally efficient at reading and evaluating them? Or, should we incentivize people to write less? How? I would be glad to hear readers' thoughts on these questions (townsend@cornell.edu). For now, I will keep opening the manuscript systems, half-convinced that each login summons another paper into my queue.

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