How and Why to Write for the Journal of Special Education Preparation

ABSTRACT

The Journal of Special Education Preparation (JOSEP) is a peer-reviewed journal that features research-to-practice information and materials for special education faculty in higher education settings. In this article we discuss the niche JOSEP is fulfilling in the field of special education teacher preparation, why authors should consider contributing to JOSEP, and how to develop and write high-quality manuscripts that have a greater chance at acceptance and publication. A general overview of the journal is presented as well as detailed checklists to use when developing a manuscript for submission.

KEYWORDS

Academic journal, faculty, special education, teacher preparation

The Journal of Special Education Preparation (JOSEP) is a peer-reviewed journal that features research-to-practice information and materials for special education faculty in higher education settings. JOSEP was founded to advance the professional development of special education faculty to provide information, resources, and tools to improve the education and experiences of preservice special education teachers and administrators. Consistent with this purpose, JOSEP publishes articles that share innovative and successful methods and materials based on current evidence-based practice for use in a wide variety of higher education programs and settings. Quite simply, JOSEP articles are written for those who prepare special education teachers and administrators (see Figure 1).

The editorial board at JOSEP believes evidence-based and high-leverage practices (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018) should be comprehensively integrated throughout teacher preparation programs. To do so, special education faculty must use current best practices to design and deliver coursework and practicum experiences to meet the diverse needs of their preservice teachers and the special education profession. Through effective and abundant practice opportunities, faculty can ensure that their preservice teachers achieve mastery and generalization of evidence-based practices to meet the diverse needs of their future students. Ultimately, well-prepared preservice teachers are profession ready to enhance the academic and social/emotional outcomes of all students. Furthermore, a well-prepared special educator is more likely to remain in the field longer (Boe, 2014), which is critical in countering chronic teacher shortages (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

The creation and dissemination of JOSEP is possible through a partnership with the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Ball State University. TED is an international professional organization that leads and supports teacher education on behalf of students with exceptionalities and their families. TED accomplishes this mission through professional development, advocacy, research, and collaboration. JOSEP aligns with TED’s mission by publishing practitioner (i.e., special education faculty) articles as an essential compo-
nent to bridging the research-to-practice gap (Hott et al., 2017).

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Currently, JOSEP content is indexed in Google Scholar. Other databases, such as ProQuest, PsycInfo, and ERIC, require 3-4 published issues before applying for indexing. Once JOSEP has enough issues published, the journal will apply for indexing within these commonly used databases which will expand the dissemination of JOSEP articles.

**Why Write for JOSEP**

Although JOSEP is a newer journal within a sea of peer-reviewed publication outlets, it fulfills a niche. No other scholarly journal specifically addresses the preparation of special education teachers in a practitioner friendly format. The journal of Teacher Education and Special Education (TESE) is the official journal of TED and is the premier journal in special education teacher preparation. However, TESE exclusively publishes original research which can often not translate into immediate application purposes for faculty who are designing and delivering instruction in teacher preparation programs. JOSEP, on the other hand, allows evidence-based practices, established in original research, to be presented in a format for immediate application. JOSEP and TESE are complimentary journals as TESE establishes evidence-based practices and JOSEP bridges the research-to-practice gap.

All special education faculty should consider submitting manuscripts to JOSEP regardless of program size or research expectations. For faculty who do work at institutions where original research is expected, JOSEP provides an avenue for implications of empirical studies to be converted into “how-to” guidance for teacher preparation. For faculty who work at institutions with higher teaching loads, JOSEP provides

**FIGURE 1:** The Components and Purpose for the Journal of Special Education Preparation
a medium for best practices and “what works” in your program to be shared with colleagues. Tenure-track, contract, and adjunct faculty are all responsible for preparing future special education teachers to succeed in a challenging professional environment for the betterment of students with disabilities. JOSEP now allows the entire special education faculty community to contribute and read literature on the development of special education preservice teachers.

What Is and Is Not Published in JOSEP?

One of the reasons there are so many scholarly journals available is that each one is attempting to meet a demand. Having explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria help contributing authors identify which journals are suitable fits for their work and which are not. Readers also benefit from clear criteria knowing where to find articles to meet their inquiry needs. In this next section, we outline what is and what is not published in JOSEP.

**WHAT IS NOT PUBLISHED IN JOSEP?**

**Original Research**

JOSEP does not publish original research. This includes single-case design, group design, qualitative, survey, action, literature reviews, mix-methods, or case-study research. Original research manuscripts have a standardized format with an introduction, methods, results, and discussion section. Other scholarly journals exist that publish original research (e.g., TESE), therefore, JOSEP is not attempting to fulfill this niche.

**Limited or No Research**

Although JOSEP does not publish original research, it also does not publish articles discussing practices with limited or no research support. Some practices or strategies are evidence based—meaning more than one study has demonstrated that the practice results in improved outcomes for certain populations (Cook & Cook, 2013). The focus of an article, however, does not need to be a singular, evidence-based practice. JOSEP articles can be grounded in research—meaning these articles draw on evidence that have demonstrated features of the practice improve outcomes. It is easy to identify if described practices are evidence based or grounded in research if the references include original, empirical research. Most references to secondary sources, such as websites, other practitioner journals, and textbooks are less appropriate and indicate the described strategy might not have sufficient research support for publication in JOSEP.

**Inappropriate Audience or Content**

Manuscripts that are not written for the target audience of JOSEP will result in a desk reject from the editorial team. The target audience of JOSEP is faculty in higher education setting
To conclude, readers should be reminded of what the problem is, why a solution is important, and what are the essential elements of implementation for the solution.

The solution(s) to address the problem or topic is detailed in this section. An example of how to implement a practice is provided in explicit and logical language. Supporting evidence from relevant studies may be used to highlight evidence-based practices.

The problem or topic of the manuscript is introduced with sufficient context. The issue pertaining to the preparation of special education teachers and/or administrators is appropriate. The issue being addressed is a broad issue like teacher shortages (e.g., Williams et al., 2021). Some critical aspects to determine appropriate content are relevancy and novelty. Relevancy means the topic is addressing a problem that many readers of JOSEP can relate to. Novelty means the problem and/or solution are described within the manuscript in unique and new ways. Manuscripts with relevant and novel content contribute to the field of special education teacher preparation and are considered appropriate content.

### Appropriate Audience

The target audience of JOSEP is special education faculty and other professionals who work directly in the preparation of special education teachers and administrators. As such, manuscripts should focus on the unique needs of faculty preparing special education teachers and administrators. From research intensive universities to small programs with perhaps one special education faculty member, manuscripts for JOSEP should be conceptualized and written with this broad spectrum of audience in mind. Like
the concept of relevancy, while not every identified problem and solution will pertain to every faculty member, implementation strategies should be generalizable to a variety of contextual settings.

**Current Research**

As a rule, references should reflect research published within the past decade. It is acceptable to reference older research that is formative in the historical context of a problem or practice, however, these should be used sparingly. Using recent research to establish the problem and describe solution steps strengthens the relevancy and novelty of a manuscript (see Table 2).

**International Spotlight**

In addition to practitioner articles, JOSEP is interested in publishing articles that highlight special education preparation practices from around the globe. The International Spotlight section of JOSEP is tailored for article contributions that discuss country specific special education preparation policies and practices. International Spotlight submissions will need to provide readers with country specific context and laws before discussing current issues pertaining to special education and teacher preparation in that country/region (see Table 3). International Spotlight submissions may outline interesting local initiatives that can generalize to historical, social, and global trends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANUSCRIPT COMPONENT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to country /region</strong></td>
<td>Familiarize readers with general facts of the country/region such as demographic information, structure of government, and historical contexts that influence current events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History of special education and teacher preparation</strong></td>
<td>Describe the evolution of special education and the preparation of special education teachers. Summarize laws and policies that shape special education. Provide contextual facts about students with disabilities to educate readers on the status of special education in the country/region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current issues in special education and teacher preparation</strong></td>
<td>Discuss current issues that the country/region is grappling with in relation to special education and preparing special education teachers. Proposed solutions to current issues may be included in this section but are not required.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**HOW TO PREPARE A SUCCESSFUL MANUSCRIPT**

Within the American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual, explicit guidelines for formatting a manuscript are provided. Manuscripts that vary dramatically in presentation from APA will not be sent out for review. To avoid common errors in formatting, authors should adhere to the following requirements.

**Formal, Academic Language**

Although JOSEP is a practitioner-friendly journal, the manuscript should reflect formal, academic language. Doing so makes content more accessible to readers. Authors should avoid the use of jargon in their manuscripts. Technical terms, if used, need to be clearly defined with examples and non-examples clarifying the terms. Similarly, the over reliance on long, complex sentences hamper the readability of a manuscript. Concise sentences enhance the readability of a manuscript and complement more complex content. Additionally, the use of tables, figures, fictional vignettes, and checklists supports the reader in comprehending material presented in the manuscript.

**Consider Perspective**

Common thought is that first-person perspective is prohibited under APA guidelines, this is not accurate. For JOSEP, first person point of view (I, we) can be used effectively (e.g., “We suggest…”). However, use of the editorial “we” is not permitted (e.g., “We, as a field, need to do a better job of…”; APA, 2020). Second-person perspective can help readers connect the content to their settings and experiences, but habitual use of “you” throughout a manuscript creates a dictatorial tone to the manuscript, which can be aversive to some readers. Third-person perspective tends to be the “Goldilocks” point of view for JOSEP manuscripts.
Maintain a Consistent Voice

Author teams who work together to submit a manuscript should be careful to maintain a consistent voice throughout the manuscript. We suggest author teams solicit an independent reader to review the manuscript and ensure a consistent voice and tone are presented across sections that may have been constructed by multiple authors.

Use Economy of Expression

Reduce wordiness, redundancy, excessive use of metaphors, and overuse of passive voice to create precise, clear communication. If authors can use one word instead of three words, they should. One of many ways to do this is to use the find feature to search for the word that. Often that is used as a filler word and does not add to the content.

Avoid Bias in Language

When writing about individuals with exceptionalities it is common to use person first language. However, some communities prefer disability first language, such as the blind and deaf community. In general, default to person first language unless an intentional discussion between person first and disability first language is included. People first language refers to both the placement of the person prior to the disability (e.g., “student with a learning disability” rather than “LD student”) and avoidance of sensational or demeaning language (e.g., “suffers from ADHD,” “is wheelchair-bound”). Avoid the use of gendered pronouns (he, she, his, hers, he/she, etc.) by making the sentence plural, dropping the pronoun, or using third person (they, them, their).

Adhere to APA Formatting Conventions

Double space all content within the manuscript (e.g., title page, abstract page, body, quotes, fictional vignettes, references) and use one-inch margins. The preferred font for APA publications is 12 point, Times New Roman.

Include a Concise Title and Abstract

Manuscripts for JOSEP offer a research-based solution to a problem of practice; the abstract should reflect this focus. Type your title in upper and lowercase letters centered in the upper half of the page. The title should be centered and written in boldface. APA recommends that your title be focused and succinct and that it should not contain abbreviations or words that serve no purpose. Your title may take up one or two lines. Your abstract should contain your topic and purpose, how you will be presenting the content (e.g., using a vignette), and a preview of the considerations the author teams are suggesting. Abstracts should typically

Use Formatting Tools Within Microsoft Word

Manuscripts produced without the use of appropriate formatting tools often lose their formatting when translated into the portable document format (PDF) and can make the document difficult for reviewers to follow or create an unprofessional look to the document that can be off-putting to reviewers. For example, when formatting a manuscript, use page breaks rather than hard returns, hanging-indent paragraph formatting for references, and alignment tools for centered titles rather than the Tab key.

FIGURE 2: JOSEP Manuscript Preparation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate Content for Practitioner Articles</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Has a specific research-to-practice focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Directly addresses the preparation of special education teachers and/or administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Presents a problem and solution that are relevant and novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Includes graphic elements to facilitate content understanding and application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ References current research</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Appropriate Content for International Spotlight Articles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Includes introduction with summary of country/region facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Discusses county/region history and guiding special education policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Examines current issues in special education and teacher preparation</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>APA Style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Uses formal, academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Presents data-based information, not emotionally charged position statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Considers perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Maintains a consistent voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Employs economy of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Avoids bias in language</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>APA Formatting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Adheres to APA formatting conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Includes a concise title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Includes a brief, focused abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Uses formatting tools within Microsoft Word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrew Markelz
Andrew M. Markelz, PhD, is an assistant professor and assistant department chair in the department of special education at Ball State University. Dr. Markelz is editor of the Journal of Special Education Preparation and co-author of The Essentials of Special Education Law. The focus of his research is on expediting the novice-to-expert teaching curve in proactive classroom management strategies and issues related to special education law.

Benjamin S. Riden
Benjamin S. Riden, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA, is an assistant professor at James Madison University. He is an associate editor at the Journal of Special Education Preparation. Dr. Riden’s research interests include using the principles of applied behavior analysis to support students with challenging behavior, preparing teachers to effectively manage their classrooms, and single case research design.

Include Graphic Elements
Tables and figures are used within JOSEP manuscripts to provide checklists, sample materials, examples, definitions, etc. Tables and figures should be referred to within the narrative (e.g., “see Table 2 for a list of common terms used”) and potential placement indicated by a notation such as <insert Table 1 here>. Tables and figures should not be inserted within the main body of the manuscript. They should be placed at the end of the document after the reference section.

Fictional Vignettes
Fictional vignettes are narrative texts that authors may invent to illustrate a problem or to present their solution and strategies. Vignettes are stories or situations that do not strictly report factual realities observed by the authors but assist readers in making connections between the content presented and personal implementation. Although fictional vignettes are not required, author teams should consider their usage. Please see Figure 2 for a checklist for preparing a manuscript for JOSEP.

Submission and Review
Once a manuscript is finalized, after careful consideration of JOSEP’s aim, scope, and preparation requirements, it is ready to submit for peer-review. The first author must create an account on JOSEP’s website https://openjournals.bsu.edu/JOSEP to gain access to the submission portal. After registration, the submitting author can upload the masked manuscript as one main document into the system. In addition, a cover letter must be uploaded separately with all authors’ contact information and any declaration of conflicts of interest or financial disclosures.

When a manuscript is submitted to JOSEP, the editorial team reviews it and decides whether the manuscript should be forwarded for peer-review. If the manuscript passes initial editorial review, it is sent to at least two peer-reviewers to thoroughly evaluate the manuscript on the basis of clarity, accuracy and validity of the topic, value of contribution to the field, implications for special education preparation, and quality of writing. See Weiss & Chituyo (2022) for a more detailed JOSEP peer-review process.

Typically, peer reviewers have 21 days to complete and submit reviews. Taking reviewer feedback into consideration, the editorial team then decides whether the manuscript is accepted for publication, needs revisions, or is rejected. It is rare for a manuscript to be accepted without at least one round of revisions required. If the manuscript is deemed appropriate for JOSEP but needs minor or major revisions, the first author is notified via email that the manuscript requires additional revisions to meet publication standards. Within that email, the first author will receive reviewer and editor comments that need to be addressed prior to resubmission as well as a resubmission date. Authors are generally given 30 days to complete revisions and resubmit. Missing
resubmission deadlines may result in a manuscript rejection.

To ensure all reviewer and editor comments are addressed, we recommend authors copy and paste each individual comment/recommended edit into one column in a table. Then, authors can specifically address each comment in a corresponding column. In addition, authors are asked to make edits within the manuscript in a different color font. These procedures allow future reviewers and editors to see exactly how each initial reviewer comment was addressed and where in the manuscript edits were made. Comprehensively and explicitly addressing initial reviewer comments will lead to a greater likelihood of acceptance following the first round of revisions.

The first author will then upload the edited manuscript and revisions table into the system for editorial review. If needed, the manuscript may be sent to the initial reviewers to determine if the edits meet expectations. Depending on the quality of reviews, the manuscript may be accepted, forwarded for another round of reviews, or be rejected. The process continues until the manuscript is rejected or accepted for publication and enters the copyedit and proof stage—before it is published.

Because JOSEP is an open-access journal, all articles are free to download with no copyright restrictions. In fact, we encourage contributing authors and readers of JOSEP to download and share published content far and wide. Article PDFs can be downloaded at no cost from the JOSEP website. In addition, article DOIs can also be found on the website and shared on social media feeds. The purpose of an open-access journal is to provide unrestricted access to scientific literature for rapid dissemination. Financial support from the TED, Ball State University Library, and the Ball State University Department of Special Education allows JOSEP to operate as an open access journal to the benefit of the special education teacher education community.

Conclusion

Conceptualizing, writing, editing, submitting, revising, and publishing a manuscript in any peer-reviewed journal is an extensive process. Contributing to JOSEP is no different. The effort, however, is worth the rewards. The field of special education teacher preparation will benefit from a peer-reviewed journal that features research-to-practice information for special education faculty in higher education settings. Although JOSEP is a new medium for the dissemination of best practices in teacher education, the ultimate success of the journal lies in the quality of content from contributing authors. We hope this article provides guidance for prospective authors considering JOSEP as an outlet for their work in effectively preparing special education teachers and administrators.

References


