

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

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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

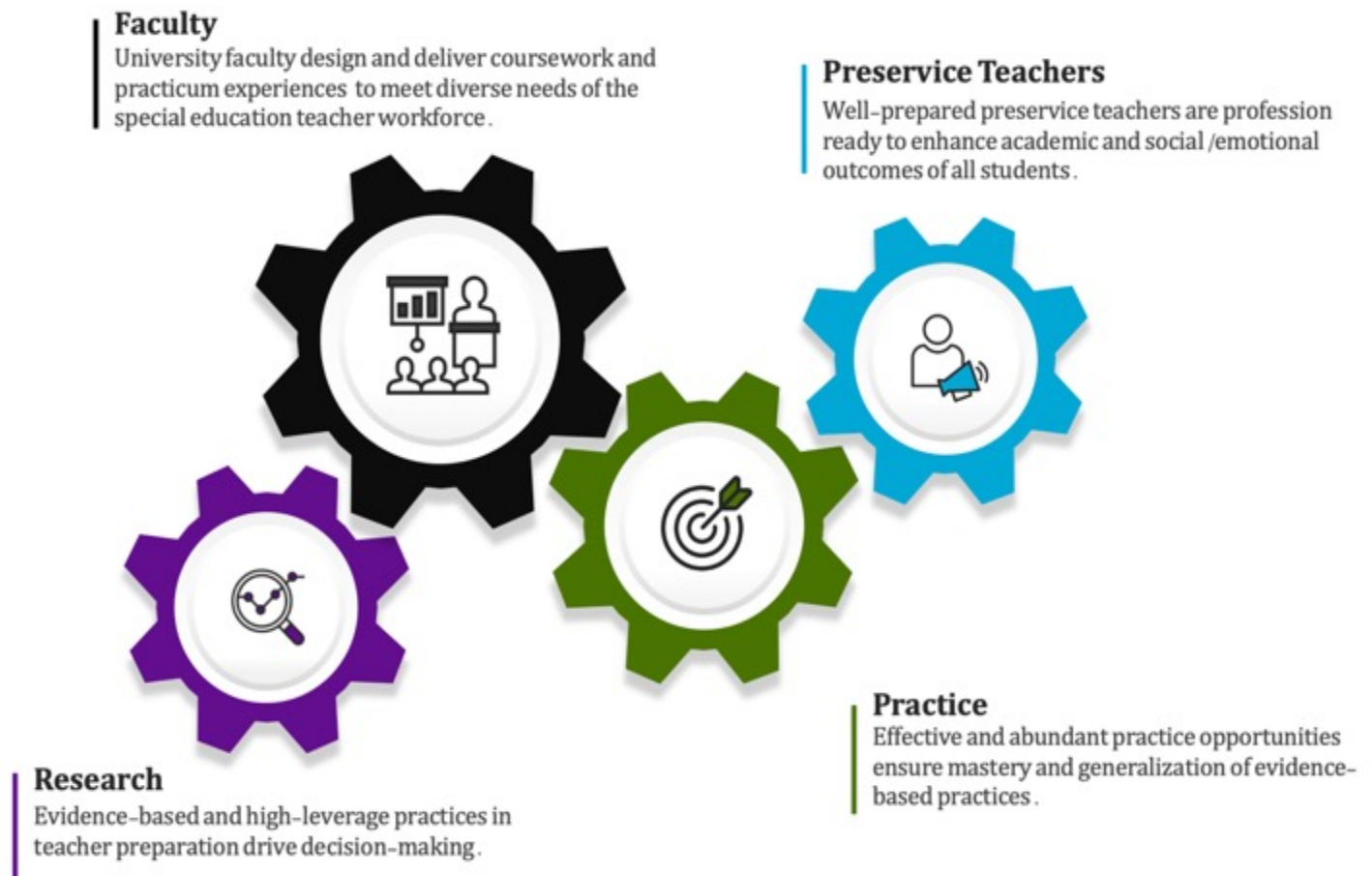
Academic journal, faculty, special education, teacher preparation

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-

FIGURE 1: The Components and Purpose for the Journal of Special Education Preparation

ment to bridging the research-to-practice gap (Hott et al., 2017).

Ball State University supports *JOSEP* with a subscription to Open Journal Systems (OJS). OJS is an open-source software application for managing and publishing scholarly journals. With this support, *JOSEP* articles are free to access, download, and share by anyone, to anyone. University libraries do not need to subscribe to unlock *JOSEP* content, nor do authors pay a publishing fee. *JOSEP* allows all special education faculty, across the globe, free and easy access to content through its website: <https://openjournals.bsu.edu/JOSEP>

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

es 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

TABLE 1: Typical Structure of a JOSEP Practitioner Manuscript

MANUSCRIPT COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Problem	The problem or topic of the manuscript is introduced with sufficient context. The problem can be presented in a fictional vignette. Recent research must be cited to establish that the problem or topic is relevant to a wide audience of faculty in special education teacher preparation.
Positioning of solution in evidence	The solution(s) to address the problem or topic is detailed in this section. An extensive review of literature is not appropriate; however, findings related to relevant studies may be used to highlight evidence-based practices.
Application section	This section represents a majority of the manuscript. Guidance for how to implement a practice is detailed in explicit and logical language. Supporting materials such as checklists, figures, tables, and examples should be included to facilitate understanding and application. Guidance should be general enough for implementation across a variety of settings. If a fictional vignette was used previously, it can be integrated within this section to provide specific “how-to” examples.
Conclusion	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.

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

TABLE 2: What Is and What Is Not Published in JOSEP

WHAT IS	WHAT IS NOT
Actionable guidance for readers	Original research such as empirical studies, literature reviews, and case studies
Relevant and novel topics	Topics and strategies that are not generalizable to a broad audience
Issues pertinent to those who prepare special education teachers and administrators	K-12 classroom strategies for teachers
Current research support for strategies (typically within 10 years)	Practices with limited or anecdotal evidence

who prepare special education teachers. Often, we will state that *JOSEP* is published for special education faculty. However, its content may be relevant for other faculty members for example educational psychology faculty, school counselor faculty, faculty in applied behavior analysis programs, or graduate level faculty, such as those who prepare special education administrators. Manuscripts describing practices for special education teachers to implement in their classrooms are not appropriate if the manuscript is directly addressing the special education teacher. Practitioner journals for special education teachers already exist (See *TEACHING Exceptional Children*). In addition, manuscripts with excessive formatting or grammatical errors are also not sent out for review.

WHAT IS PUBLISHED IN JOSEP?

Practitioner Articles

JOSEP publishes articles that are 18-25 pages in length including abstract, figures, tables, and references. As a research-to-practice journal, all manuscripts should be grounded in an appropriate research base or founded upon a strong understanding of recent legislation. The key to successful manuscripts for *JOSEP* lies in the author's ability to translate content into action-

able guidance for practitioners (i.e., special education faculty). Manuscripts should be well organized with a simple message for immediate application. The typical structure of a *JOSEP* manuscript begins with a presentation of a problem followed by a brief synthesis of relevant, recent empirical research. The bulk of the manuscript is then devoted to the delineation of detailed practice guidelines supplemented with tables, figures, and examples. Many manuscripts include scenarios or examples (commonly referred to as "fictional vignettes") illustrating how suggested practices might be implemented with one or more individuals or in different contexts; however, vignettes are not required (see Table 1).

Appropriate Content

Apart from what was detailed in the previous section about what is not published in *JOSEP*, there is a wide spectrum of what constitutes appropriate content. In general, any issue or problem pertaining to the preparation of special education teachers and/or administrators is appropriate. The issue may be narrowly focused such as using a culturally responsive lens to discuss the revision of a core preparation course (e.g., Williams et al., 2021). Or address a broader issue like teacher shortages with how to recruit, support, and retain

a racially diverse special education teacher workforce (e.g., Scott & Proffitt, 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. Problems that are limited in scope such as recent legislation that impacts teacher preparation in one state, or an issue within a unique university course that many other universities may not offer are not considered relevant to a majority of *JOSEP* readers. 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

TABLE 3: Typical Structure of an International Spotlight Manuscript

MANUSCRIPT COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Introduction to country /region	Familiarize readers with general facts of the country/region such as demographic information, structure of government, and historical contexts that influence current events.
History of special education and teacher preparation	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.
Current issues in special education and teacher preparation	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.

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.

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,

FIGURE 2: JOSEP Manuscript Preparation Checklist

Appropriate Content for Practitioner Articles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Has a specific research-to-practice focus <input type="checkbox"/> Directly addresses the preparation of special education teachers and/or administrators <input type="checkbox"/> Presents a problem and solution that are relevant and novel <input type="checkbox"/> Includes graphic elements to facilitate content understanding and application <input type="checkbox"/> References current research
Appropriate Content for International Spotlight Articles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Includes introduction with summary of country/region facts <input type="checkbox"/> Discusses county/region history and guiding special education policies <input type="checkbox"/> Examines current issues in special education and teacher preparation
APA Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses formal, academic language <input type="checkbox"/> Presents data-based information, not emotionally charged position statements <input type="checkbox"/> Considers perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains a consistent voice <input type="checkbox"/> Employs economy of expression <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids bias in language
APA Formatting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Adheres to APA formatting conventions <input type="checkbox"/> Includes a concise title <input type="checkbox"/> Includes a brief, focused abstract <input type="checkbox"/> Uses formatting tools within Microsoft Word

references) and use one-inch margins. The preferred font for APA publications is 12 point, Times New Roman.

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.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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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.

be no more than 250 words. In addition, include 3-5 key words below the abstract that identify main topics of the manuscript.

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 & Chitiyo (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 publication phase.

Publication

The publication phase of a manuscript consists of thorough copyediting and formatting to fit *JOSEP*'s online publication layout and style. The process can take several weeks to complete, but since *JOSEP* publishes issues in their entirety, a publish-ready article may be held in que until the next available is-

sue. Currently, *JOSEP* publishes bi-annually (May and December). Additional issues may be published, however, depending on manuscript submission and acceptance rates. Authors will have one final chance to read and make minor edits to their article—called the “final 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.

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