

How to Review for the Journal of Special education Preparation

AUTHORS

Argnue Chitiyo
Margaret P. Weiss

Journal of Special
Education Preparation
2(1), 14-18
© 2022 Chitiyo and Weiss
Licensed with CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0
License
DOI: 10.33043/JOSEP.2.1.14-18
openjournals.bsu.edu/JOSEP

ABSTRACT

The *Journal of Special Education Preparation (JOSEP)* is an open access, peer-reviewed journal that is dedicated to the dissemination of research-informed practices for special education faculty in higher education settings. The peer review process for *JOSEP* involves a critical examination of submitted manuscripts for quality, organization and conciseness of ideas, novelty of ideas for practitioners, and adherence to APA guidelines. This article describes the review process for *JOSEP* and offers suggestions on how to write a high-quality review report. Reviewers for *JOSEP* follow a standard set of procedures when reviewing and providing feedback for submitted manuscripts. The ultimate goal of the review process is to ensure that manuscripts are of high quality and address important topics in special education teacher preparation.

KEYWORDS

Academic journal, peer-review, special education, teacher preparation

The *Journal of Special Education Preparation (JOSEP)* is dedicated to the dissemination of research-informed practices in teacher preparation. The journal is a newcomer in the world of special education journals and was established to fill the gap that existed between dissemination of research on preparation and the implementation of those practices in preparation programs. Given this purpose, that of being a journal for practitioners, providing peer reviews for manuscripts submitted to *JOSEP* is different from that of providing reviews for research journals such as *Teacher Education and Special Education*. The purpose of this article is to provide a guide for individuals who are completing reviews or considering completing reviews for manuscripts submitted to *JOSEP*.

Peer Review in General

Peer review is the process of quality control used by most academic journals. As Hoffman (2022) states, “Construc-

tive and effective peer reviews advance scientific knowledge through respectful and civil critiques that identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript presented to them” (p. 86). Though it can be lengthy and does require significant time from members in a field of study, peer review provides a more democratic means for journal editors to determine whether or not to accept a paper for publication. The general process starts when the editor receives a manuscript for consideration. They read the manuscript and determine whether the content is appropriate for the journal and the writing is up to journal standards. If not, they can decide to issue a *desk reject* and return the manuscript to the author with reasons for the rejection. If the manuscript fits the purpose of the journal and meets writing standards, the editor will choose two or more reviewers to read and provide commentary on the paper. The editor invites those reviewers to complete the review. They can either accept or decline the invitation. If they accept, the reviewers read the manuscript, make comments

regarding the content and writing, and then provide the editor with a suggestion as to whether to accept or reject the paper. The editor always makes the final decision. Trust that reviewers and authors are working collaboratively “and in good faith in a process that examines both the merits and challenges of each submission in a fair and impartial manner” is the only way this process works (Hoffman, 2022, p. 87).

Why Should I Review?

A quality review of a manuscript takes a significant amount of time. The manuscript must be read carefully, comments must be made, thoughts put in writing, and then the review submitted. So why would anyone do this work? Being a reviewer allows an individual to read a broad range of work in areas of their own interest. As a doctoral student, being a reviewer allows one to become more familiar with the field, see multiple forms of writing, understand how other reviewers provide feedback, and become known to journal editors. As a more experienced practitioner, being a reviewer also provides a window into the field and hones one’s skill at formulating ideas for papers and writing for multiple audiences. In all cases, being a reviewer is an area of service that is recognized and applauded when included in one’s curriculum vita. In all honesty, the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in any scientific field would not be trustworthy or democratic without the participation of broad and diverse groups of individuals serving as reviewers.

The JOSEP Review Process

The review process begins with individuals who accept the call to be on the editorial board of any journal. For *JOSEP*, in particular, the editorial board is evolving as the journal finds its place in the field.

TABLE 1: Review Evaluation Checklist

Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is it concise? <input type="checkbox"/> Does it adequately align or reflect the focus of the paper?
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does it summarize the importance of topic to practice/practitioners? <input type="checkbox"/> Does it include a brief description of background, purpose, and conclusion?
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does it give sufficient background/evidence to support practice? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the introduction establish a generalizable practice? (i.e., is the manuscript applicable to a lot of people?) <input type="checkbox"/> Is evidence current? (i.e., updated, most recent citations) <input type="checkbox"/> Do the authors include a vignette (not required)? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the paper applicable to special education faculty? <input type="checkbox"/> Is paper written in non-technical jargon (tone)?
Vignette	<p>If the manuscript includes a vignette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is it relevant and integrated into the text? <input type="checkbox"/> Is it culturally relevant? <input type="checkbox"/> Does it add/clarify implementation of the practice? <input type="checkbox"/> Is it thorough enough?
Implementation/Description of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are the implementation steps clear? <input type="checkbox"/> Are sufficient examples provided? <input type="checkbox"/> Can readers generalize article implementation tips to other settings? <input type="checkbox"/> Are figures and tables used to enhance clarity/implementation guidance? <input type="checkbox"/> If vignette is used, does vignette add to the clarity/readability/structure of the paper?
Checklist for international spotlight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> History of country <input type="checkbox"/> Policy and practice <input type="checkbox"/> Current education practice, policy, issues <input type="checkbox"/> Specific to special education <input type="checkbox"/> Is it clear, concise, grammatically sound?

An Invitation to Review

Members of the editorial board might receive two invitations a year to review manuscripts. They will receive an invitation from the *JOSEP* editor with two link options: agree or decline. The email specifies a timeframe for the reviewer to make a decision about accepting the

invitation to review, usually three to five days. This time allowance enables the reviewer to evaluate their schedules and determine their availability to review the manuscript before making a commitment. Factors to consider when making a commitment may include: Do I have the time to review? Will I meet the obligation/deadline? The question

TABLE 2: Reviewer Recommendation

DECISION	DESCRIPTION
Accept submission	Does manuscript address all criterion listed in figure? If so, manuscript is ready for publication
Revisions required (Minor revisions)	Manuscript meets journal requirements with minor edits to prepare for publication
Resubmit for review (Major Revisions)	Substantial portions of the manuscript require revision in order to meet review requirements
Decline submission	Manuscript fails to address a substantial portion of review criteria

FIGURE 1:
Sample Review
Letter Statements

Revisions

Required Sample:

- *Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript, (Title of Manuscript Here). The material in the manuscript is very valuable to practitioners. Providing relevant and helpful feedback to teachers is critical to their practice. The process described in the manuscript could also be used for self-reflection by teachers in a meaningful way.*
- *While I believe this manuscript could be an important contribution, it will require revisions to enhance clarity and usefulness to JOSEP readers. Therefore, I am going to recommend what I will call a minor revision because I am suggesting changes to the introduction and conclusion and not so much to the description of the practice. I would like to encourage the author(s) to seriously consider the following revision suggestions, given the usefulness of the piece.*

(List specific suggestions)

Reject Sample:

- *Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript, (Title of Manuscript Here). The topics of experiential learning and computational thinking are very important to the teacher education literature. However, I am going to recommend that you Reject this manuscript for publication. Allow me to elaborate.*

(List reasons for reject recommendation)

TABLE 3: Guide for Feedback Comments

DO

- Provide concrete evidence and specific examples from the manuscript to support your recommendations.
- Be specific in your recommendations.
- Be thorough.
- Be professional and respectful.
- Remember to include strengths of the manuscript.

DON'T

- Make recommendations that are unnecessary elements or are out of scope for the manuscript.
- Use the review to promote your own work.
- Focus on typos and grammar.
- Submit your review without proofreading it and checking everything one more time.

Note. Adapted from PLOS (n.d.)

regarding time is crucial because *JOSEP* works with hard binding deadlines. The target audience for *JOSEP* is higher education practitioners who may or may not have research experience. As such, the assumption is that those reviewing for *JOSEP* are familiar with the topic and purpose of *JOSEP*. Yet, unlike reviewing for research-focused journals, reviewers for *JOSEP* do not need to be an “expert” in a particular area to conduct a review. Manuscripts for *JOSEP* should be written in practitioner-friendly language that sufficiently explain theoretical concepts for a wide audience. Anyone reading a *JOSEP* article should be provided with definitions, research support, and explicit directions to learn about and implement strategies. If an expert is needed to understand the topic presented, the manuscript probably does not meet the practitioner-friendly tone and style of *JOSEP*. Therefore, reviewers should not shy away from reviewing manuscripts outside their “area of expertise.” Reviewing such manuscripts may be an excellent way to ensure articles published in *JOSEP* are truly filling the niche it was created to fill.

When receiving the invitation email, it is important for potential reviewers to respond promptly. That way, journal editors can make further decisions without delay. If a reviewer declines to review for whatever reason, the editor will send invitation emails to other potential reviewers. In some cases, when reviewers decline an invitation, they may make recommendations for other potential reviewers.

When a reviewer accepts an invitation to review, they receive another email with the review materials and deadlines. The turnaround timeframe for *JOSEP* is 21 days, meaning reviewers have to submit their completed reviews within 21 days. Completing a quality review can be time consuming and we encourage reviewers to consider this when making

their decision to review. The next sections of this article contain guidelines to help reviewers write high quality reviews and to make informed decisions when providing recommendations for manuscript acceptance or rejection.

Conducting the Review

JOSEP is a practitioner journal that publishes practitioner articles addressing special education teacher preparation globally. Manuscripts submitted to *JOSEP* are therefore expected to adhere to four main guidelines: (a) be a practitioner-friendly manuscript, (b) include content directly related to special education teacher or administrator preparation, (c) target an audience of special education higher education faculty, and (d) be grounded in evidence-based or high leverage practices (see Markelz & Riden, 2022). The editor makes an initial determination as to adherence to these requirements. Any submitted manuscript that does not address the goals and aims of *JOSEP* will not proceed to reviews.

Table 1 lists manuscript elements that are typically evaluated in a *JOSEP* manuscript. Each of the five sections detail key elements to consider and assess under each category. When reviewing each of these respective elements, reviewers assess the extent to which authors provide the minimum necessary details, the validity of the details, and whether they are substantiated. The title, for instance, is a concise statement summarizing the manuscript. It captures key content details about the manuscript, which includes purpose and target population. APA requires that titles be concise enough to capture minimum necessary details, avoid being too long to include unnecessary details, and contain no abbreviations. The length should not exceed 12 words.

The abstract provides a detailed summary of manuscript elements. Normally, when readers are pulling up articles to

read, the abstract is the first port of call. A majority of readers will make a decision to read or not read an article based on the abstract. A well-written abstract should therefore give a reader the minimum necessary summary about manuscript background, purpose, and implications. All summary details should not exceed 250 words. Lastly, the abstract should include at least four key words that can be used as search terms in indexing databases.

The introduction section serves many purposes of setting the manuscript context and significance, rationale and relevance, and purpose statements. For a *JOSEP* publication, the introduction provides background information about the topic and evidence supporting the practice. Studies cited to support evidence should be relevant and current. When assessing the introduction, reviewers should examine for the following elements: Do authors provide enough evidence for the practice? Does it include a generalizable practice? Does it include a vignette? Does the discussion target special education general audiences (i.e., faculty, teachers, students, etc.)? If the introduction includes a vignette, the reviewer needs to check if the vignette is culturally relevant, if it clarifies implementation of the practice, if it is thorough enough, and if it is truly integrated into the content. The introduction should also establish a generalizable practice, provide evidence for application to a general audience, and not use excessive technical jargon.

The main body of a *JOSEP* manuscript provides a thorough description of the practice, implementation procedures, issues, challenges, and opportunities. In this case, reviewers need to ascertain whether the practice is clearly explained, implementation steps are clearly described, sufficient examples are provided (through vignettes or other), and if tips for generalization are complete. If authors provide figures and tables to sup-

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Argnue Chitiyo

Argnue Chitiyo, PhD, BCBA, is an assistant professor in Applied Behavior Analysis at Ball State University. Dr. Chitiyo is the associate editor of the International Spotlight section of JOSEP. He has several years of teaching experience in the USA and Zimbabwe. His areas of research interests include evidence-based practices for children with special educational needs and autism. He also has a broad interest in the research and development of special education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Margaret Weiss

Margaret (Peggy) Weiss, PhD, is an associate professor in special education at George Mason University. Dr. Weiss is an associate editor at JOSEP. Her research interests include co-teaching and effective interventions for students with disabilities at the secondary level. Dr. Weiss also studies eCoaching and teacher identity development in traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs.

plement the implementation narrative, reviewers need to check if the tables and figures are properly formatted to APA.

JOSEP also publishes manuscripts that address special education practice in countries other than the United States in the International Spotlight section. The procedures and requirements for this section are similar, however, reviewers will need to evaluate whether the international spotlight manuscript provides sufficient background of the country's history and local contexts. International spotlight articles do not have to focus on a particular strategy, rather, the purpose is to educator readers on country or region specific special education preparation policies and practices.

JOSEP follows APA guidelines for style of writing. In addition to the critical elements described above, reviewers need to inspect manuscripts for APA formatting for in-text citations, headers, font and font size, spacing, margins, paragraph alignment and indentation, and referencing. These should all conform to the APA 7th edition manual.

Writing the Review

After completing the manuscript review, a recommendation has to be made regarding whether or not the editor should accept, revisions required (minor revisions), review and resubmit (major revisions), or reject the manuscript. The reviewer should include all suggestions for revisions in a report to the editor and authors (see Table 2). When writing feedback for recommendation, the reviewer's aim is to describe what authors need to do in order to qualify for publication. As such, reviewer feedback should be explicit regarding areas that need revision. Reviewers are therefore encouraged to provide constructive and critical feedback comments that authors can use to improve their manuscript. Specific and actionable comments are

necessary to assist the editor in making an accept or reject recommendation and are also necessary for authors to edit the manuscript as suggested. It is best practice to provide author feedback on a separate Microsoft Word document with an introductory statement (see Figure 1). When listing specific revisions, list page and paragraph numbers for each suggestion so that authors can easily identify these sections in the manuscript. Some additional guidelines on giving feedback are listed in Table 3.

Conclusion

Volunteering to be a reviewer for JOSEP is critically important to its success. Please consider lending your expertise to the journal as a reviewer. Given that JOSEP is a practitioner journal and one that has a goal to encourage diversity in perspectives, reviews for the journal should always: (a) include professional unbiased language, (b) provide clear and constructive critique with suggestions, (c) be thorough and substantive, and (d) meet timelines and deadlines. We encourage reviewers to use the checklists and descriptions included in this article to guide their reviews. Additional resources can also be found in Weiss (2017). When in doubt, always contact the editor to ask questions or to clarify any details.

References

- Hoffman, A. J. (2022). A modest proposal to the peer review process: A collaborative and interdisciplinary approach in the assessment of scholarly communication. *Research Ethics*, 18(1), 84-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F17470161211051230>
- Markelz, A. M., & Riden, B. S. (2022). How and why to write for the journal of special education preparation. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, 2(1).
- PLOS. (n.d.). How to write a peer review. <https://plos.org/resource/how-to-write-a-peer-review/>
- Weiss, M. P. (2017). How to review for TEACHING Exceptional Children. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 50(3), 123-129. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0040059917743480>