

The Importance of Style and April *JOE* Highlights

Abstract

In the first section of the Editor's Page, "The Importance of Style," I provide inspiration for adhering to editorial style. In "April *JOE* Highlights," I discuss articles in the issue that focus on Extension's role in larger collaborative systems and multidisciplinary efforts, approaches that give shape to the action of listening to Extension audiences, and methods for enhancing Extension professionals' use of technology and big data.

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The Importance of Style

An author submitting a manuscript for publication should have a real sense of style. Not hipster-beard or white-ankle-boots style but *editorial* style. Editorial style is a set of conventions related to language, mechanics, and typography that a publisher applies to bring consistency and clarity to the contents of an academic journal or other publication. For example, some writers use the serial comma, others don't, and still others (many, or perhaps most) use it erratically, but a publisher decides definitively whether the serial comma will or will not be used in the contents of its publication.

Outside the rule-governed realm of editorship, not much thought is given to editorial style. However, as is stated in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, authors writing for a publication "must follow style rules established by the publisher." Those of you who read *JOE* and also are scholarly writers are bound by this obligation. Therefore, I'd like to provide you with some inspiration for caring about style. If you don't adhere to style rules, you run the risk of distracting readers or, worse yet, confusing them. Imagine that someone reading a paper you've written continually notices your use of a written-out term in some places and the corresponding abbreviation in others. This reader is not as fully engaged with the value of your words as he or she could be. Or suppose you have used inconsistent formatting across the heading hierarchy in the piece and, accordingly, a reader must work harder to track the development of your argument. As with poor grammar, lack of attention to style can leave readers wondering about your meaning. The point of editorial style, then, is not to confound you with comma placement demands but is instead to help you write the clearest, most engaging paper possible.

Fortunately, style resources abound. For example, the primary style guide for *JOE* is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition (APA manual). Additionally, a resource on the *JOE* website —[Journal of Extension Style and Guidance for Avoiding Common Manuscript Problems](#)—provides *JOE*-specific style information and information that can be found in other style sources but relates to errors prospective *JOE*

authors commonly make. And if you can't find what you're looking for in those sources, *The Chicago Manual of Style* conveys most everything else you need to know. I recommend reading through both the APA manual and the *JOE* style and guidance document, even if you've been publishing for a while. With regard to style, authors often don't know what they don't know. Therefore, you should read these guides with the mind-set of identifying misconceptions you have about style, areas for which you didn't know rules existed, and so forth.

Make time to learn editorial style. Your writing will be clearer, more coherent, and more engaging (and you'll bring great pleasure to editors of the journals to which you submit your work).

April JOE Highlights

A theme running through this issue is Extension as facilitator/collaborator/organizer-in-chief. From the lead Feature, "[Ramping Up Rural Workforce Development: An Extension-Centered Model](#)," which presents a community-based approach positioning Extension as a critical intermediary in generating rural workforce solutions, the issue returns again and again to Extension's role in larger collaborative systems or multidisciplinary efforts. For example, another Feature, "[Nonprofit Partnerships in Extension Programming: A Pilot Study](#)," lays a groundwork for the exploration of strategic partnering between Extension and nonprofit organizations and the multifaceted benefits likely to result from such work. In the Research in Brief section, "[Repro Money: An Extension Program to Improve Dairy Farm Reproductive Performance](#)" describes a successful farmer-directed, team-based Extension program in which 100% of the farm owners involved chose a county Extension agent as team leader. And as with the lead Feature, the Ideas at Work entries "[Extension: The Backbone Organization in Statewide Population Health Management](#)" and "[Establishing an Agricultural Summit](#)" address initiatives that place Extension at the central point in effecting coordinated positive change—in these cases, related to building healthy communities and facilitating open exchange between agricultural stakeholders and public policy officials. Across this content underlies the premise that Extension is ideal for these roles because of the organization's historical and current relationship with communities and ability to foster systemic data-driven action.

Other articles focus on approaches—both formal and informal—that give shape to the action of listening to Extension audiences. The authors of the Feature "[Using Dialogue to Engage Agricultural Audiences in Cooperative Learning About Climate Change: A Strategy with Broad Implications](#)" report on a technique that not only led to revealing discussions among stakeholder groups with differing viewpoints but also left 98% of participants feeling "completely listened to." Proposing a twist on traditional needs assessment methodology, the author of the Ideas at Work entry "[Extension Involvement in Collaborative Groups: An Alternative for Gathering Stakeholder Input](#)" explains how joining collaborative stakeholder groups offers Extension educators access to discourse that by its nature revolves around community educational needs. Additionally, the Tools of the Trade offerings "[Rapid Needs Assessment and Response Technique](#)" and "[Tools and Strategies for Documenting Educational Connection with Diverse Audiences](#)" present tools that help educators hear from audiences and respond extemporaneously to their needs.

Best practices and innovative methods for enhancing use of technology and big data are addressed as well. The Research in Brief article "[Impact of an Extension Social Media Tool Kit on Audience Engagement](#)" and the Ideas at Work entry "[How to Create Videos for Extension Education: An Innovative Five-Step Procedure](#)" focus on new approaches to using social media and video to provide educational content. Noting that Extension professionals are engaging more often with vast volumes of data, the authors of the Tools of the Trade article "[Using Computational Text Classification for Qualitative Research and Evaluation in Extension](#)" introduce a broadly applicable process for coding large amounts of data that saves time and resources and can help researchers

"scale, accelerate, and ensure reproducibility of their research."

Articles mentioned here represent just some of the useful content in this issue. Others address studies and programming related to bioenergy crop production, grandparent caregivers, response to herbicide-resistant weeds, pollinator health, and more.

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