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Publishing in the *Journal of Extension*—A Place for All Authors

Abstract

This commentary highlights the mission of the *Journal of Extension* as a scholarly space for Extension professionals to publish intellectual and creative work that enhances and advances the profession of Extension. I explore broadly the complex nature of the publishing process from the perspective of author, reviewer, and Extension Journal, Inc. (EJI) board member. I also focus on the ways in which the EJI board is working to streamline the publication process and suggest ways in which authors can contribute to the process through the careful preparation of high-quality manuscripts.

Keywords: [writing](#), [scholarship](#), [publishing](#), [authors](#)

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Since 1963 the *Journal of Extension* (JOE) has provided a scholarly space for Extension professionals to publish intellectual and creative work that enhances and advances the profession of Extension. With content on strategic directions for the organization, impactful research findings, novel ideas, useful techniques and technologies, and stimulating perspectives, JOE is an important source for professional development and programming insights for Extension professionals. A somewhat understated part of the JOE mission (although noted prominently on the JOE website) is the commitment of the journal to support emerging scholars and new authors, including students.

In March of this year I joined the Extension Journal, Inc. (EJI) board of directors, representing the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents. Although I have been publishing in JOE for over 15 years, and have been a peer reviewer for almost as long, this is my first experience "behind the scenes" at JOE, an experience that has provided the opportunity for me to see how JOE is managed and to understand more clearly the related editorial issues and concerns. This multifaceted role of author, reviewer, and board member has allowed me to observe the balancing act required to support authors of all abilities and produce a rigorous scholarly journal—a journal we can all be proud of.

One issue the board grapples with, as do publishers of many other academic journals, is timeliness. As an author, I have been surprised and at times frustrated by the length of time from submission to publication in JOE,

especially during periods when the time from final acceptance to publication has been lengthy. I distinctly remember when my last piece was accepted for publication eagerly checking each subsequent issue for my article and being concerned when it was not included. Shortly after joining the EJI board, I was contacted by several other authors expressing their own concerns over the length of time it takes for a manuscript to go from submission through editorial review and then peer review and, ultimately, on to publication. Sharing that experience, I was prepared to raise the publication timeline as something critically important for the board to address. Having now participated in board discussions on the topic, I realize that although improving the publication timeline is indeed a critical issue, it is also a complex one.

Another issue of concern to the EJI board is manuscript quality. As a reviewer, I have encountered this issue firsthand. I have waded through poorly conceived and prepared manuscripts and have even refused to conduct reviews because the quality of a manuscript was so poor. More than once I have wondered whether authors were submitting hastily written drafts with the idea that the reviewers and editor would provide feedback to improve the manuscript rather than putting in the hard work required to prepare a polished paper. Although feedback for improvement is an important part of the review process, it is not the role of reviewers and editors to write a paper for an author. The burden of developing a manuscript that is ready for review is the author's obligation.

But here is the rub—emerging scholars, new authors, and students do not always possess the well-honed skills needed to produce quality scholarly writing. Writing is a craft; learning to write well takes practice and time. Good scholarly writing depends on the ability to formulate an idea, identify an audience, draft and develop a cohesive argument, refine and connect statements, lead the reader to a logical conclusion, and along the way pay attention to the myriad style and technical details required in academic writing. Learning to write academically is a process of socialization—socialization into the use of formal rather than colloquial language, substantiated rather than opinionated argument, and structured rather than free-formed presentation. Socialization into scholarly writing takes time and practice, and the support of writing mentors who guide nascent authors to competence.

As I became more aware of *JOE's* mission to provide an outlet for emerging scholars, new authors, and students in addition to accomplished authors, I came to understand the challenges related to hastening the publication process and processing manuscripts that arrive in varying states. More important, I began to see *JOE* in a somewhat different light. I began to think about the collective wealth of knowledge embodied in the hearts and minds of Extension professionals across the country. Extension professionals, especially those based in communities, working side by side with their clientele, represent a vast storehouse of not just program area knowledge but also methods of community engagement and Extension education. More often than not, Extension professionals' days are filled with teaching, conducting applied research, building community capacity, and developing partnerships rather than reading journal articles or searching Google Scholar. Without regular practice, writing is hard! And the strategy of sitting down to write an article in a day rarely results in a quality manuscript. Writing also takes planning and time (Belcher, 2009; Mills, Hill, & Saunders, 2016).

As an EJI board member, I now see more clearly the struggle to maintain a place for all Extension professionals to publish. From accomplished and seasoned authors to those who submit their first manuscripts, we all have lived experience in our work as Extension professionals that we need to share with one another in order to advance and enhance the work we do together. As a board member serving on the editorial committee, I also see that it takes all of us working together to make *JOE* a high-quality journal that lives up to its mission.

For their part, the EJI board and *JOE* editor Debbie Allen continually explore ways to improve the publication

process, associated materials, and the journal itself. Some results of these efforts are as follows:

- Acting on a commitment by the board to elevate the editorial quality of the journal, the editor takes actions to ensure that articles published in *JOE* are grammatically and mechanically correct and clearly written, contain unambiguous and accurate presentations of data, and are compliant with the journal's rules for editorial style.
- The editor develops resources to support authors, such as the document *Getting Published in JOE: Strategies for Success* (<https://www.joe.org/for-authors-getting-published-in-joe-strategies-for-success.php>). These resources are extensive and take time to read, understand, and apply, but they serve as important socialization tools for new authors and as references for veterans.
- The editor conducts an initial review to address concerns in a manuscript prior to peer review. Although this extra step can be time consuming, the result is that manuscripts advanced to peer review are of better quality, which facilitates the review process.
- Stemming from recent discussions on length of time to publication for peer-reviewed manuscripts, the editorial committee has changed the editorial review process. Previously, the editor rejected a manuscript, asked to see a revised version of the manuscript, or allowed the author to make revisions and upload the manuscript for peer review. Now, in most cases, the editor either rejects or advances manuscripts. This means that more manuscripts are rejected before peer review, but using this approach saves editorial time and helps ensure a quality paper for peer review. Per standard *JOE* procedure for manuscripts rejected at editorial review, the editor provides constructive feedback, refers authors to resources on the *JOE* website, and encourages authors to resubmit after they have more carefully prepared their manuscripts.
- The editorial committee has shortened the length of time allowed for post-peer-review revision from 4 to 3 months.
- The editorial committee maintains a cadre of knowledgeable, conscientious reviewers. These reviewers contribute to quality and timeliness when they provide thorough and clear feedback, help socialize authors by expecting them to revise and resubmit as needed and emphasizing that doing so is common in academic publishing, provide meaningful explanations when rejecting manuscripts, and complete reviews on time.

Authors too, whether new or experienced, bear responsibility for reducing the length of time to publication and ensuring the quality of *JOE*. Each academic journal has its own manuscript preparation requirements that authors are responsible for following. *JOE* authors and their mentors can attend to this responsibility by fulfilling various obligations:

- Authors should follow the *JOE* Submission Guidelines (<https://www.joe.org/for-authors-submission-guidelines.php>), which provide detailed information about preparing and submitting manuscripts. They should not operate under the assumption that the editorial review will reveal what they "need to do to get published."
- Faculty should supervise student authors and assist them in navigating, understanding, and following the guidelines for manuscript preparation. Such oversight is an important part of the socialization of student scholars. Former *JOE* editor Laura Hoelscher (2008) addressed the critical role faculty play in supporting student authors in her Editor's Page "Teach Your Students Well"

(<https://www.joe.org/joe/2008october/ed1.php>).

- Authors should ask colleagues to review their work before submission. This important step is often overlooked by new authors. Colleagues can play an important role in identifying issues before a manuscript is submitted, thus helping ensure the quality of the paper.
- Inexperienced authors should seek assistance in developing their writing skills. One method for doing so is collaborative writing with colleagues (Teuteberg et al., 2016).
- Authors should attend conscientiously to feedback resulting from the editorial and peer review processes.
- Authors should submit revisions in a timely manner—the sooner an author submits a revision of a manuscript, the more quickly advancement to publication can occur.

Through my position as author, reviewer, and EJI board member, I have been privileged to be part of the *JOE* community in a comprehensive way, allowing me to see the many aspects of the peer-review publication process. This opportunity has given me an appreciation for all that happens behind the scenes before the day I see my own articles published in *JOE*. My position also has helped me to envisage and appreciate *JOE* as a place for *all* scholars and authors and to grasp the important role each of us plays in ensuring that *JOE* remains the central place where Extension professionals share and learn together.

Acknowledgment

This commentary grew out of an in-depth conversation among the *JOE* editorial committee members. The committee was wrestling with how to share improvements that have been made to the publication process and engage the *JOE* community in building on those improvements by preparing quality manuscripts. While the commentary reflects my personal ideas and not those of the entire editorial committee necessarily, I am grateful for the stimulating conversation that set the stage for this piece. It is a privilege to work with such interesting, caring, thoughtful, and inspiring colleagues.

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<https://joe.org/joe/output/2018june/comm1.php#discussion>

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