

Encouraging Citation Through Clear Writing and April *JOE* Highlights

Abstract

In "Encouraging Citation Through Clear Writing," I offer a new, critical, and evidence-based incentive to encourage prospective *JOE* authors to work toward crafting the most effective manuscripts they can. In "April *JOE* Highlights," I focus on articles in this issue surrounding the theme of new ways of thinking in and about Extension.

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Encouraging Citation Through Clear Writing

For many important reasons, a goal of the scholarly author is citation of his or her work. First and foremost, citation of a scholarly work equates to greater dissemination of the important information within that work. After all, the purpose of scholarship is to share critical knowledge. Citation also means that one's work is contributing to the scholarly dialogue on a topic and helping form the basis for other valuable work. These two reasons alone should bring fulfillment to an author whose work is well cited. Additionally, and precisely because of the aforementioned reasons, citation is a way of demonstrating the value of one's work. It's likely that most *JOE* readers grasp these concepts. Now I'll tell you something you may not know. Evidence suggests that one way to garner more citations of your work is to write better.

In multiple Editor's Pages, through a webinar and author resources on the *JOE* website, and on numerous pages of manuscript, I have harped on about the importance of effective writing. I have extolled the virtues of considering the reader, approaching scholarly writing as telling the story of one's research, embracing first person and active voice, applying parallelism and consistency in the use of language, and employing signposts such as headings, transitions, topic sentences, and correct punctuation to lead readers through a work. My efforts represent an attempt to persuade prospective authors to commit to writing well for the sake of clear communication. But now I proffer another, perhaps even more compelling carrot—citation! Researchers examined 130 peer-reviewed articles that had garnered varying numbers of citations to ascertain whether the articles exhibited 11 measurable elements of effective writing and identify connections between citation level and writing style (Freeling, Doubleday, & Connell, 2019). Elements they identified as integral to good writing related to—you guessed it—an accessible narrative style, use of first person, transitional language, signposts, appropriate punctuation, consistent language, and parallelism, and they characterized writing rich in those elements as work that had been written with the reader in mind (Freeling

et al., 2019). Using data on citation levels of the studied articles and a quantifiable index developed from the 11 targeted writing style elements, they determined that articles having higher levels of citation also scored higher on the writing index (Freeling et al., 2019).

Freeling et al. (2019) acknowledged that good writing takes time and so asked "Is there really a benefit to writing better?" (p. 341). Their conclusion was a resounding yes! That benefit comes in the form of greater citation and all the gains that go with that reward. Scholarly writers in the *JOE* audience who value citation should consider this evidence and conscientiously work toward crafting the most effective manuscripts they can to increase the influence of their work.

April *JOE* Highlights

The need for new ways of thinking is a theme that runs through this issue and is exemplified by its first two Commentaries, both of which focus on future directions for Extension. Speaking for a group of 26 Extension leaders, the authors of "[Engage the Future: The New Extension Learners](#)" describe a current context in which the label *nontraditional learner* has no meaning and ask provocative questions about Extension's role in serving the diverse education seekers of today. In "[Leveraging Cooperative Extension's Competitive Advantages for Success in 2019 and Beyond](#)," the author expresses a view of Extension from a business perspective, focusing on ways in which the organization outperforms competitors and exploring associated components of strategic vision and innovation that will keep Extension relevant in an evolving marketplace.

A handful of other articles apply the idea of new thinking to the specifics of planning and evaluating Extension programs. In assessing a 4-H volunteer conference, the authors of the Feature "[Using an Innovative Multiple-Methods Approach to Evaluate Extension Conferences](#)" implemented no fewer than six alternative evaluation methods that engaged participants in creative ways. Their holistic approach led not only to volumes of rich data for future program planning but also to an enriched experience for the participants and unexpected artifacts for use in "sharing the impact of the event with decision makers, stakeholders, and potential funders." Another new way of thinking about evaluation—one drawn from the museum field—is explained in the Research in Brief article "[Using Time to Assess Extension Exhibits](#)." Flipping evaluation on its head, the authors of "[Beyond Evaluation: Using the RE-AIM Framework for Program Planning in Extension](#)," in the Tools of the Trade category, describe application of a known evaluation tool not during program assessment but at the planning and implementation stages. And in another twist on typical thinking, the authors of the Ideas at Work entry "[Effective Engagement with Latino Youths and Communities](#)" emphasize how a needs assessment grounded in a systematic community development approach can itself be an instrument of "community outreach, relationship building, and engagement," facilitating these undertakings well before the associated program ever begins.

A third group of articles focuses on new ways of thinking related to critical contemporary issues clamoring for attention from Extension, such as food insecurity, the rural–urban digital divide, balance between producer profitability and conservation efforts, and increasing numbers of refugees worldwide. These articles include the Commentary "[Extension's Role in the United States' Campaign to Reduce Food Waste](#)," the Feature "[Building a Rural Library Hotspot Lending Program: Results from a One-Year Pilot](#)," and the Research in Brief offerings "[Tailoring Extension Efforts for Promotion of Diversified Crop Rotation Systems](#)" and "[Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Refugees in Central Iowa: Opportunities for University Extension](#)."

The articles highlighted here are not the only ones that will inspire *JOE* readers to open their minds to new

ideas. For more perspectives on new ways of thinking as well as important research findings, well-thought-out initiatives, and useful tools, read on.

Reference

Freeling, B., Doubleday, Z. A., & Connell, S. D. (2019). How can we boost the impact of publications? Try better writing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(2), 341–343. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1819937116>

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