How to Write for TEACHING Exceptional Children

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All professions have a responsibility to ensure that their members are knowledgeable about current topics and issues and continue to update their skills to reflect emerging best practices in the field. Professional journals are an important vehicle for sharing new developments in research, policies, and practices with colleagues. There are numerous national professional journals in the discipline of special education and disability studies; two of the most well known and highly respected are those published by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): Exceptional Children, a research journal, and TEACHING Exceptional Children (TEC), a practitioner journal. This article provides guidelines to help prospective authors publish in TEC.

What Is TEC?

TEC is a scholarly journal whose purpose is to provide practitioners with new ideas and tools that can be applied immediately to their daily work with children and youth with exceptionalities. CEC publishes TEC as a print journal (TEC Print) distributed by mail to all members and subscribers six times a year, with each volume year beginning in September/October and ending in July/August. TEC has been published continuously since 1968; its editors have been leaders in the field, selected for their breadth of content knowledge and prior journal editing experience. Each TEC Print issue typically contains several articles, an editorial, and advertisements; sometimes other features are included, such as a report on the status of the journal or an update on an emerging issue. More recently, CEC has begun to publish selected TEC articles in a digital interactive format (TEC+) to offer options for sharing information through multimedia files and downloadable templates and forms. TEC+ articles are available online through the CEC Journal Gateway and are included in the print issue’s table of contents. The print issue also carries one-page overviews of TEC+ articles.

The information published in TEC is intended for practitioners who work with learners who have disabilities or are gifted and talented at the preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Although the primary audience is teachers, in special education or general education, an important secondary audience is individuals who support teachers, such as related services specialists, administrators and supervisors, and teacher educators. Our readership is wide-ranging, and includes:

- Faculty members who assign readings in college courses for training new teachers.
- Teacher education candidates who use strategies in activities in field and clinical experiences at assigned schools.
- Novice teachers who need support in refining skills during their early years and experienced teachers who not only adopt new ideas in their own practice but also use them when mentoring new colleagues.
• School leaders who integrate information into professional development activities for their teaching staff.
• Graduate students and researchers who consider these practices when designing research.
• Parents of students with exceptionalities who want to enhance their ability to participate in their children’s educational programs.

What Is (and Isn’t) Published in TEC?
TEC is focused on publishing innovative ideas that make an original contribution to the professional literature by describing practical applications that others can adopt or adapt in their own work. The articles that appear in each issue offer readers new ways to implement current evidence-based practice supported by references to the professional literature. They provide detailed and specific suggestions that other practitioners can immediately and easily use in their own classrooms and programs. Articles include content that makes the information more engaging for readers (such as scenarios, examples, or illustrations) as well as resources that offer additional information or tools (such as lists of books and materials, web site resources, and templates and forms). Although all topics related to teaching children and youth with exceptionalities can be published in TEC, the editorial team is especially interested in manuscripts that address current and emerging topics that have high interest for readers.

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10 Steps for Writing a TEC Article
1. Identify a unique evidence-based practice that has been used successfully and is worth sharing with others.
2. Review the TEC Submission Guidelines.
3. Read recently published issues of TEC to get a sense of the preferred format and style of articles and topics that have been extensively or recently covered.
4. Identify an exemplar article recently published in TEC that can serve as model to use when writing the manuscript.
5. Prepare an outline that lists the main components of the manuscript, with key points, examples, and resources.
6. Write a first draft by expanding the outline, providing an introduction that explains why practitioners need this information, discussing the literature that establishes the evidence base for the practice, and describing in detail all activities needed to implement the practice.
7. Add several examples that illustrate how to apply the practice when working with learners with exceptionalities.
8. Include additional elements such as tables and figures to assist readers in implementing the practice, focusing on as frameworks, sample forms, and recommended resources.
9. Write a final draft that incorporates all these components, matches the exemplar article in structure and style, and conveys information clearly and persuasively.
10. Proofread the manuscript to check spelling, grammar and formatting, using the guidelines in the APA Style Manual.

American Psychological Association (APA, 2010). For more information, see the TEC Submission Guidelines, online at http://journals.cec.sped.org/tec/submission_guidelines_custom.html. The guidelines are also included in TEC 45-5, May/June 2013 print issue.

Reading recent issues of the journal will help you learn more about the range of topics covered and the ways in which authors make content appealing to and useful for practitioners. If you are not sure whether your topic or approach is a good fit for the journal, you can send an e-mail query to one of the editors (for contact information, see http://journals.cec.sped.org/tec/contact_editors.html) outlining what you propose to include and requesting guidance on whether or not to submit.

To learn more about what and how to publish in TEC, you should plan to attend the “How to Write for TEC” session conducted by the editorial team at CEC’s annual conference. See box, “10 Steps for Writing a TEC Article,” for additional guidance.

The editorial team and reviewers are responsible for ensuring that articles published in TEC match the purpose and audience for this journal. A manuscript will only be considered if it describes an innovative practice that is directly useful to practitioners, well supported by current peer-reviewed professional literature that provides an evidence base for its effectiveness, and described in sufficient detail that it can easily be implemented by readers. Table 1 describes manuscripts generally not accepted for consideration or publication in TEC.

If your manuscript is of a type that TEC does not publish (e.g., a research report, position paper, literature review) you should consider submitting it instead to one of the many other journals and associations in the field that may be a better match for your work.
other journals in the field of education. You can learn more about the types of manuscripts that are appropriate for CEC’s flagship journal, *Exceptional Children*, at http://sped.org/Publications/CEC-Journals/Exceptional-Children and for other journals published by CEC’s Special Interest Divisions at http://sped.org/Membership/Special-Interest-Divisions. It also can be helpful to use a resource such as Cabell’s Directories(http://www.cabells.com/directories.aspx), an electronic searchable database, to identify an appropriate publication; many universities and libraries subscribe to Cabell’s. Finally, show your manuscript to a colleague or mentor who is knowledgeable about publishing in this discipline and ask for guidance in choosing an appropriate journal.

### How Are Articles Submitted to TEC?

TEC is an open submission journal, so anyone can submit a manuscript for consideration and review; in fact, the majority of manuscripts published in TEC come through the open submissions process. The editors also may identify individuals who have presented or published on topics of high interest and encourage them to prepare and submit a manuscript, or solicit manuscripts from a specific individual or group that has previously published on a topic. TEC also publishes special issues on critical and time-sensitive topics for which the editors recruit or invite authors to contribute manuscripts.

Like many journals, TEC uses an online manuscript submission, review, and editing system (see http://journals
All contacts are managed within the system, whether between the authors and the editorial team or between the editor and reviewers of a manuscript. This system allows all records related to a specific manuscript to be maintained in a single location, so that information is easily accessible and readily retrievable.

You do not have to be a member of CEC to submit a manuscript to TEC and you will not be asked to pay any fees for review or publication. If you are not a member of CEC or have not previously submitted to TEC, you will need to create an account in order to submit a manuscript. When you are ready to submit your article, simply log in to the system and follow the directions for uploading a Microsoft Word document. You can also log in to the system at any time to update your contact information.

**What Happens During a TEC Review?**

TEC currently uses a three-stage review process to determine which manuscripts merit publication in the journal. The process (see Figure 1) includes an initial review, peer review, and an editorial decision (see the Submission Guidelines online or in the May/June 2013 issue of TEC for a more detailed discussion of the process).

The editor conducts the initial review to determine if the manuscript is generally a reasonable match to the purpose of and audience for this journal and whether TEC has published articles on the same topic in recent issues. The editor does not assess the quality of the manuscript during the initial review, focusing solely on whether or not it is generally appropriate for TEC. If the manuscript is not appropriate for publication in TEC, the system will send you an e-mail rejection notice. The editor also may choose to offer suggestions for how you can reconceptualize the content to address TEC’s purpose and audience so you can submit a new and different manuscript at a future date.

If the editor considers your manuscript appropriate for the journal, it is sent to three peer reviewers who represent expertise related to the main topic (e.g., instructional methods and preschool programs, autism and language development, transition and English language learners) and a balance of perspectives (e.g., faculty member and practicing teacher, knowledge of content area such as mathematics, knowledge of practical application such as strategy instruction). In a blind review (that is, manuscripts do not contain any identifying information), peer reviewers assess whether the manuscript represents an innovative idea, reflects current evidence-based practice, and presents information clearly...
When reviewers read your manuscript, they will be applying their considerable knowledge of current evidence-based practices as well as their broad range of experience working with children and youth with exceptionalities to identify the manuscript’s strengths and the weaknesses and the extent to which it merits publication in TEC. Reviewers provide the editor with feedback and recommend (a) accepting the manuscript, (b) asking the author to revise and resubmit, or (c) rejecting the manuscript. Unless they recommend rejection, most reviewers will offer general or specific suggestions for changes in content and style to make your manuscript more suitable for publication in TEC.

The editor then rereads the full manuscript to make an independent assessment of the manuscript’s suitability for publication in TEC, and compiles a written decision that provides feedback and outlines any suggested changes. The system sends an e-mail to the author regarding the decision and a summary to the reviewers (with author contact information removed).

When you get the decision notice, you should read it and all reviewer comments carefully to determine what you need to do. If the decision is not to accept your manuscript, you may want to reconceptualize the content and style and prepare a new article for submission at a future date; or, you may be able to use the feedback to improve the manuscript and submit it to a different journal. If the decision is accept or revise and resubmit, you need to know what changes you have been asked to make by the reviewers and the editor and by what due date you must submit the revised manuscript.

What if a Manuscript Needs to Be Revised and Resubmitted?
When the editor and peer reviewers suggest that a manuscript requires revision to match the journal’s purpose and audience, the author generally needs to resubmit the manuscript within 4 weeks from the date of the decision letter. The revised manuscript is reviewed by the same peer reviewers. The process of manuscript review at this point follows the same steps of editorial review of recommendations and notification of the decision.

A manuscript that is well matched to TEC’s purpose and audience often still requires some minor revisions to address reviewer concerns or to improve clarity or readability.

What should you do if you are invited to revise and resubmit? Although in one sense the manuscript is not yet suitable for the journal, in another sense the reviewers and editor want to encourage an effort to improve it. If you choose to revise and resubmit your manuscript, you should read the reviews and decision letter carefully and make all requested changes. If you are not sure you understand some suggestions or if there are contradictory comments, send an e-mail to the editor to ask for clarification. You should prepare the revised manuscript and upload it by the new due date.

What if a Manuscript Is Accepted?
A manuscript that is well matched to TEC’s purpose and audience often still requires some minor revisions to address reviewer concerns or to improve clarity or readability. Acceptance is always contingent upon an author making the required changes; if this is not done, the manuscript will not be published and may be withdrawn from further consideration. The editor forwards the final draft to an associate editor, who edits the manuscript for content, ensures that any releases or permissions are obtained, and works with the authors to make any final changes. Finally, the finished article is sent on to CEC Publications staff, who copyedit and prepare the manuscript for publication.

When your manuscript is accepted for publication, you should read the reviews and decision letter carefully and make all required changes or contact the editor for clarification if needed. It is your responsibility to confirm that you have the right to publish all content included in the manuscript. If you have included material that has been published elsewhere, photos or screen shots of commercial products, or photos of individuals, you will need to obtain relevant releases and permissions. All TEC authors sign an agreement that transfers to CEC the copyright for the published content; this means you cannot publish the article elsewhere without the express permission of CEC.

Ready to Write for TEC?
Some people think that writing a manuscript for a professional journal is difficult and intimidating; others believe that writing is a talent, like that of artists or musicians, that only certain people are born with. The power of a TEC article lies in sharing the current science of the discipline in an appealingly artful way that impacts the practice of professionals who serve learners with exceptionalities. So, writing for TEC is both an art and a science—and it is a skill that can be learned with some effort and improved with repeated practice. TEC receives over 200 manuscripts a year (about a 20% acceptance rate), so only the most carefully written manuscripts are likely to be accepted. Table 2 provides some “do’s and don’t’s” for prospective TEC authors.

Of course, following these suggestions does not guarantee that your work will appear in TEC, but doing so may help move your manuscript past an initial rejection and into the peer review process. TEC’s reviewers are leaders in the art and science of special education; their work helps CEC maintain the high quality of the articles that appear in each issue. You, too, can help TEC continue to be the journal with the most influence on professional practice in serving students with
### Table 2. Do’s and Don’ts of Writing for TEC

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tr>
<td>Authorship</td>
<td>Believe anyone can write a <em>TEC</em> article, to share an innovative practice that will be useful to other practitioners who work with children and youth with disabilities or who are gifted.</td>
<td>Believe that only people with advanced degrees or special training can write for <em>TEC</em>.</td>
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<td>Audience</td>
<td>Write for the many prospective and practicing educators who read <em>TEC</em> to learn about practical applications they can implement immediately when working with exceptional students.</td>
<td>Write for researchers or policymakers or experts, focus on a narrow subgroup within the field, or write for an audience other than those who work with exceptional students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practicality</td>
<td>Write in a style that is practical and engaging; this will have the greatest impact on professional practice and individual learning.</td>
<td>Add to the gap between research and practice by emphasizing research and failing to focus on the details of practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence base</td>
<td>Cite a few critical studies to show that this practice is scientifically-based but get to the practical applications quickly (typically by the third page).</td>
<td>Cite too many references or unrelated references in the traditional format for a research report or literature review (more review pages than practice pages).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Use a sound argument, make smooth transitions between sections, and follow APA guidelines when writing the manuscript.</td>
<td>Be too creative in writing the manuscript, violating journal guidelines or reader expectations for structure and style.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>Use engaging images to illustrate the content, such as photos of people engaged in the practice or screen shots of products; be sure to obtain appropriate releases and permissions have been obtain.</td>
<td>Use images (especially of young people or commercial products) that are not directly related to the content or without obtaining releases or permissions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Prepare a succinct literature review, including a few key citations from the peer-reviewed professional literature to provide the evidence base for the practice; limiting references to one to one and a half pages at most.</td>
<td>Prepare a lengthy literature review with excessive citations or include references that are out of date or not directly related to the practice.</td>
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<td>Peer feedback</td>
<td>Invite a colleague or friend read the manuscript to check for clarity of information, ease of applying the practice, use of people-first language, grammar and spelling, and references.</td>
<td>Submit a manuscript without a final read-through by an independent reader who can provide objective feedback on the content and style.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final draft</td>
<td>Proofread, check references, use APA, and keep it practical (notice that is a theme here!) and then upload to the <em>TEC</em> system.</td>
<td>Assume the article will be accepted. <em>TEC</em> has approximately a 76% rejection rate. This statement is not to discourage you from submitting but to remind you to do everything you can for a positive review.</td>
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<td>Submission and review process</td>
<td>Be patient while your manuscript is reviewed, make careful revisions (if invited) on the basis of reviewer and editor comments, and understand that it may take some time before your manuscript (if accepted) appears in the journal.</td>
<td>Request repeated updates during the review process, take reviewer or editor comments personally, be careless in making revisions, or expect immediate publication in the next issue.</td>
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disabilities and those who are gifted: by writing a manuscript that shares your innovative ideas with others in the field.

**Who Can Write for TEC?**

Truly, anyone and everyone can write for TEC; the key is to describe an innovative model or strategy that is solidly grounded in evidence-based practice in a way that is useful and appealing to practitioners. TEC manuscripts are often written by a team, whose members include faculty and students, teacher educators and school personnel, administrators and teachers or therapists, or colleagues at multiple universities across the country. Other manuscripts are written by individuals, such as a graduate student sharing the applications of a successful action research project, a special educator describing a classroom application of new technology, a general educator sharing ideas for curriculum modifications in an inclusive classroom, or a researcher translating study findings into strategies and tools for use in schools. People who have implemented a new practice themselves or trained others to implement it make the best authors because they can explain the process and offer resources that will assist TEC’s readers to learn and adopt the practice in their own work settings.

Here are some questions to help you determine if you are ready to become a future TEC author:

- Are you currently working or have recently worked with learners with exceptionalities and have developed your own unique way of applying some current evidence-based practice?
- Do your colleagues frequently come to you for new ideas to use in working with their own students or their families?
- Have you designed and delivered inservice workshops on new and emerging practices that were well-received by school-based personnel?
- Do you consider yourself an expert in the field with extensive knowledge of current research and the strong ability to translate study findings into ideas that practitioners can understand and use?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, then you can and should consider writing a manuscript for TEC (see box, “Helpful Resources for Writers”).

**Why Write for TEC?**

CEC’s publications are among the most widely read professional journals in the world. TEC distributed to the over 29,000 members of CEC, and membership surveys show that readers frequently share individual articles or whole issues with students, colleagues, and families. In addition, TEC has some 850 subscribers, many of which represent large public and private libraries that offer access to many more potential readers. Publishing in TEC gives your ideas widespread dissemination to a global audience of practitioners.

TEC is meant for practitioners, yet many practitioners mistakenly think they cannot or should not write for the journal—it’s not part of their job description, usually, and they may feel that they are not qualified to write for scholarly journals. However, many practitioners come up with new ideas that can
Helpful Resources for Writers

Books


Articles


Web Sites
TEACHING Exceptional Children Submission Guidelines
http://journals.cec.sped.org/tec/submission_guidelines_custom.html

Emerald Author How-To Guides (for academic and practitioner audiences)
How to Write for a Practitioner Audience
http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors/guides/write/practitioner.htm

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
http://owl.english.purdue.edu

How do you know whether you have an idea worth sharing through publication? Consider how others have an idea worth sharing through publishing and sustain collective knowledge and academic rewardsystem does not

value publishing in practitioner journals as highly as in research journals, or they may have difficulty translating their expert knowledge into information that practitioners can understand. Yet, experts must work to close the research-to-practice gap by collaborating and communicating more effectively with practitioners (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001). Teachers typically do not read academic journals, so researchers must ensure that study findings are “translated to teacher-friendly instructional forms in order to be implemented in classrooms” (Abbott, Walton, Tapia, & Greenwood, 1999, p. 340). The most efficient way to communicate research to practitioners is through publications that are characterized by “simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotion, and stories” (Cook, Cook, & Landrum, 2013, p. 176).

So, no matter your role, you can and should write a manuscript for TEC. Consider what new ideas you have, based upon your practice or your research, that others would like to know. Think about which of your contacts might participate in a collaborative writing relationship: a colleague? a graduate student? a faculty member? Whether you are a first-time author deciding whether to try your hand at publishing or a successful author with many articles and books to your credit, publishing in TEC can be an excellent way to make a contribution to the professional literature, support your colleagues by sharing information, and have a far-ranging effect on how learners with exceptionalities are taught for years to come.

References


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