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The *Writers' Workshop* is a collaborative endeavour of the JALT Writers' Peer Support Group (PSG). Articles in the column provide advice and support for novice writers, experienced writers, or nearly anyone who is looking to write for academic purposes. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration, please contact us.

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Key Points About Keywords

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Sometimes when submitting a paper for publication, the journal will require you to include a few descriptive keywords in order to facilitate its discovery on web searches. Here is an example of such a request, taken verbatim from the *JALT Journal submission guidelines* (Notes on editing & formatting, n.d.):

Following the Japanese translation of the abstract, include between two and five keywords, in alphabetical order, separated by a semi-colon. The use of keywords is a new addition to JALT Journal, so articles in past issues may not contain them. Keywords: abstract; American Psychological Association; reference list; style guide

Choosing keywords is no big deal, right? Just pull a few terms off the top of your head and be done with it. Well, even though such a casual approach will technically fulfill a submission requirement, bringing a bit more awareness and attention to optimizing keywords is worth the effort. In short, effective keywords can put your paper on the first or second page of a search result, thus making it more convenient for other researchers to cite. The more citations the better, as this is a measure of your paper's effectiveness and a reflection of your credibility and expertise as an academic (Miranda, 2016). Fortunately, choosing effective keywords does not require in-depth knowledge of sophisticated *SEO* (search engine optimization) techniques. In this column, I will cover a few key points about keywords to help get you started quickly and easily. I will also introduce a few free online tools that automate this task and help you test out and fine-tune your ideas.

The Goldilocks Approach: Not Too Short or Too Long

Ideally, a keyword should actually be a short phrase consisting of two to four words (How to choose the best keywords, n.d.). Single words tend to generate overly broad results, but long sen-

tence-length phrases can lead search engines to filter results to such an extent that your paper is not included (Miranda, 2016). Let's call this the *Goldilocks approach* to choosing keywords, to make it easy to remember. Naturally, on occasion, single words may be unavoidable, but as a general rule of thumb, short phrases highly relevant to your study will lead to the best outcomes.

Avoid Using Words From Your Title

When you begin choosing the keywords, start with your title. Search engines scan article titles first and place great weight on these words (How to find keywords effectively, n.d.). Your title should already contain the most important concepts and ideas, so grab a thesaurus and find a good synonym or two. You want terms that rephrase, complement, and supplement your paper's title.

Highlight the Main Topic and Methodology

For better results, focus on the key concepts in your paper. Usually, you cover these points in the abstract and introduction, so look there for ideal keywords that capture the essence of what you are trying to do. For example, if you wrote up a report on a classroom action research project, mention the main intervention and how you went about collecting data. For example, how can you express the key aims of your study in a single phrase or two? What sort of methodology did you use? Did you analyze recordings? Examine samples of student writing? Evaluate various classroom activities? Tuning in to what you did, how, and why can spur some effective keyword creativity.

Follow Any Journal Guidelines

This point supersedes all others! Even if single word keywords are best avoided, but the journal guidelines call for them, you need to follow the rules. Familiarity with submission guidelines is an essential task in any case, so while you are at it, make note of any guidance on keyword choice. In the example from *JALT Journal* cited above, note how the only stated requirements are total number of items (two to five) and a bit of formatting advice

“Hm! Interesting,” you may think. “According to this data, the term *EFL* seems much more prominent. Okay, let’s use that.” In this way, Google Trends can help you test out and refine prospective keywords.

Final Thoughts

To recap, the topic of keywords may seem minor, but it is one of those academic writing details which can add a lot of value to your career. After all, it is not just about getting published—it is about doing everything possible to make sure your work gets noticed and cited. You have built your work on the shoulders of others, so it behooves you to do what you can to help others build upon yours. Of course, good research and writing is most important, but wouldn’t it be a shame if all your hard work went for naught if your paper was difficult to find? Choosing effective keywords need not be a tiresome chore. In fact, paying some attention to this detail can help you reflect on your work in productive ways. Good keywords, along with your title and abstract, are

your manuscript’s public face. Taking some time to research the best options is a healthy use of your time and energy and a small but positive step you can take to improve your career.

References

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[JALT FOCUS] SIG FOCUS



Robert Morel & Satchie Haga

JALT currently has 30 Special Interest Groups (SIGs) available for members to join. This column publishes an in-depth view of one SIG each issue, providing readers with a more complete picture of the different SIGs within JALT. For information about SIG events, publications, and calls for papers, please visit <https://jalt.org/main/groups>.

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Collaboration is a cornerstone of JALT activities and the same goes for SIGs. Even though many people often think of collaboration occurring only within a SIG, there is an ever-growing amount of collaboration between SIGs as well as among SIGs, local JALT chapters, or other groups. This year, the SIG Focus column would like to highlight SIG collaboration in all its forms. Please feel free to contribute or suggest ideas by emailing us at jaltsigfocus@gmail.com.

The Performance in Education SIG

Ashley Ford, Nagoya City University, PIE SIG Publicity Chair

David Kluge, Nanzan University, PIE SIG Co-Coordinator

“Collaboration is fundamental to our approach”

The Performance in Education (PIE) SIG (founded in 2011 as the Speech, Drama, & Debate SIG) is involved with a myriad of teaching activities (still including drama and debate but now much more!) that require students to cooperate and collaborate together, so it is natural that our SIG also participates in many collaborative activities with JALT chapters and SIGs. In the beginning, we created events by ourselves, which established our SIG as a vibrant entity. We started collaborative ventures by providing speakers to chapters upon request (Tokyo, Fukui, Fukuoka, Gifu, Nagoya, Okayama, Hiroshima, etc.). These came from SIG members who were also officers of local JALT chapters or local chapter officers we met at conferences who invited us to come and present. Also, we received some cold-call emails from chapters who realized that presentations on roleplay would be interesting and useful to their members.