

## Writing effective cover letters for journal submissions: Tips and a Word template

Journal editor's name  
Title  
Journal Name

Month Date, 2016

Dear Dr. Last Name:

I would like to submit the manuscript entitled "your article's name" by author names to be considered for publication as xxxxxxxx [paper type: "an original article", "a brief communication", "a case report"] in the Journal Name.

xxxxxxx [Summarize the research problem/gap, your main research findings, and the implications of your findings]. We believe these findings will be of interest to the readers of your journal.

[[Revise or delete any of the following standard statements used in cover letters]]  
We declare that this manuscript is original, has not been published before and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

We know of no conflicts of interest associated with this publication, and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome. As Corresponding Author, I confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved for submission by all the named authors.

[[Add any other statements/information required by the journal here]]

We hope you find our manuscript suitable for publication and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Sincerely

When you need to submit a cover letter with your manuscript, you'll probably write it just before submission. Like many other authors, you may find yourself wondering what to write and taking longer than you expected, causing last-minute delays and stress.

To help you write effective cover letters—and to write them quickly and easily—in this article we offer some **tips** on layout and appropriate wording. Also, you can download our **template cover letter** (Word file) to help you save time writing and help you remember to include standard author statements and other information commonly required by journals.

[Get the Word cover letter template](#)

**Note:** If you are submitting a **revised paper** to the same journal, the response letter to the reviewers is different from the cover letter used at initial submission. You can find tips and a template on [writing effective response letters to the reviewers in our previous article](#).

Many journals require a cover letter and state this in their guidelines for authors (alternatively known as author guidelines, information for authors, guide for authors, guidelines for papers, submission guide, etc.). For some journals, a cover letter is optional or may not be required, but it's probably a good idea to include one.

### Why do some journals ask for cover letters?

- 1 Cover letters that include standard statements required by the journal allow the journal staff to quickly confirm that the authors have (or say they have) followed certain ethical research and publishing practices. These statements assert that the authors followed standard practices, which may include (i) adhering to ethical guidelines for research involving humans ([Declaration of Helsinki](#)), involving animals ([ARRIVE guidelines](#)), or falling under institutional guidelines; (ii) obtaining ethics approval from institutional review boards or ethics committees; (iii) obtaining informed consent or assent from participants; (iv) complying with authorship criteria (e.g., [ICMJE criteria](#)); (v) confirming no duplicate submissions have been made; and (vi) recommending reviewers for your paper, which may include specifying peers that you prefer not be contacted.

- 2** Cover letters can summarize your manuscript quickly for the journal editor, highlighting your most important findings and their implications to show why your manuscript would be of interest.

Some journals, such as [Nature](#), state that while a cover letter is optional, it provides “an excellent opportunity to briefly discuss the importance of the submitted work and why it is appropriate for the journal.” Some publishers, such as [Springer](#), recommend that you write a cover letter to help “sell” your manuscript to the journal editor.

- 3** Cover letters that contain all of the information required by the journal (as stated in the guideline for authors) can indicate that you have spent time carefully formatting the manuscript to fit the journal’s style. This can create a good first impression. Addressing the letter to a named editor at the journal also shows that you took the time to write your letter (and by extension, your manuscript) with care and considered the fit with the journal beyond just impact factor.

### What makes an effective cover letter?

Cover letters should be short—preferably no more than 1 page—and they often use single line spacing. The content can be broadly divided into six sections:

1. Addressee’s information and date of submission
2. Opening salutation
3. Purpose statement and administrative information
4. Summary of main research findings and implications
5. Statements or information required by the journal
6. Closing salutation and your contact information

Cover letters can be submitted as normal text files, such as Word, or input directly in a field in the journal’s online submission system.

Let’s look at some tips for each section. And don’t forget to [download the template](#), which shows these tips already in place.

#### 1. Addressee’s information and date of submission

- Check the journal’s website for the name of the editor who handles submissions; this could be the Managing Editor or an editor assigned to your geographical region. If no handling editor is named, address your cover letter to the Editor-in-Chief. Some journals ask that you identify a specific editor for your specialty.
- Write the name of the addressee in the top left corner of the page.
- Write the date beneath. To minimize the number of line breaks used in your cover letter (and help keep it to one page of text), you can put the date to the right if you wish.
- Note that dates written as numerals only can be confusing: 02/03/2017 can be read “2 March 2017” in British and “3 February 2017” in American English. Using the format “3 February 2017” or “February 3, 2017” is clear.

#### 2. Opening salutation

- Write the title and last name of the addressee (exclude the first name); for example, “Professor Brown” or “Dr. Baker” (British English: “Dr Baker”).
- If you can’t find a named editor on the journal website, then you can use the opening salutation “Dear Editor”.
- At the end of the opening salutation, you can use a comma or a colon; that is, “Dear Dr. Baker,” or “Dear Dr. Baker:” (British English uses the comma; American English uses either, but the colon is considered more formal).

### 3. Purpose statement and administrative information

- Clearly state the purpose of your letter (that you are submitting a manuscript) and then state your manuscript title, author names (or first author “Brown et al.”), and article type (e.g., original paper).
- Be sure to use the journal’s own terminology to refer to the article type; for example, some journals use the term “Regular Articles” for a full research paper, whereas others use “Original Submissions”, “Full Papers”, “Original Articles”, among others.
- See the [downloadable Word template](#) for an example sentence that presents this information clearly and concisely.
- If your submission consists of many files, consider summarizing them in one short sentence so that the journal editor is sure all of the files have been received; for example, “There are 8 files in all: 1 main manuscript file, 1 highlights file, 3 figure files, 1 table file, 1 supplementary data file, and 1 supplementary figures file”.

### 4. Summary of main research findings and implications

- In a new paragraph, summarize the purpose of your research (the research gap or problem it addresses), the main findings, and finally the implications of these findings. This is your main chance to highlight the value of your work to the journal editor, so keep this short and focused. (Journal editors may receive thousands of submissions annually, and many fulfill editing duties on top of their own research and teaching schedule, so you should strive to make their jobs easier by providing as concise a summary as possible.)
- Be sure to tailor your statements so that they’re in line with the readership of the journal. For example, if you are submitting to a more general journal that has a diverse readership, underscore the possible impact your findings could have in multiple fields. Conversely, if you are submitting to a publication with narrow scope, you can write about your findings in highly focused terms.
- Avoid simply reproducing sentences verbatim from the abstract—which the journal editor will likely read next. Instead, if you take sentences from your abstract as a base to work from, then try to craft a much shorter summary that clearly fits the journal’s focus and that highlights the implications of your work for the journal’s readers. In fact, [Nature](#) guidelines state specifically to “avoid repeating information that is already present in the abstract and introduction.”
- When stating that you think your work is a good fit for the journal, be sure not to use exaggerated flattery. Avoid using words like “esteemed” and “prestigious” to describe the journal: “We believe that these findings will be of interest to the readers of your ~~esteemed/prestigious~~ journal.”
- It’s helpful to the journal editor to state if your work directly relates to a paper published by another author in the same journal. Also, mention if your study closely relates to or extends your previously published work, so it is clear why your submitted manuscript is novel or important enough to publish.

### Common phrases in this paragraph:

Summarizing the purpose of your research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study presents/summarizes/examines...</li> <li>• X remains a problem for (engineers/software developers/local government). In this study, we (examined/investigated/developed and tested)...</li> </ul>
Presenting your main results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our main findings/results were that...</li> <li>• The most interesting/important findings were that...</li> <li>• Most importantly, our findings can improve/reduce/help...</li> </ul>
Highlighting the relevance of your findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These findings should enable (engineers/doctors/local government) to...</li> <li>• We believe that these findings will be of interest to the readers of your journal.</li> </ul>

## 5. Statements or information required by the journal

- In this new paragraph, provide any statements that the journal requires be included in your cover letter. Be sure to review the journal's guidelines to know what information you should provide.
- Some journals or publishers have very specific requirements. For example, [PLOS](#) requires that authors describe any prior interactions with the journal in the cover letter, as well as suggest appropriate Academic Editors from the journal's editorial board to handle the submission.
- Some journals require that sentences are provided verbatim in the cover letter. The guidelines will tell you to copy and paste the sentence provided in quotation marks into the cover letter. For example, [Springer](#) states that cover letters should contain two specific sentences: "We confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal" and "All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to [insert the name of the target journal]."
- Several statements pertaining to research and publication ethics are commonly required by journals across a broad range of fields. These are given in our [downloadable Word template](#). When using the template, you can retain the statements in full, revise them slightly as appropriate to your circumstances, replace them with any similar wording required by the journal, or delete them if they do not fit your specific situation.

### Common phrases in this paragraph:

Previous contact with the journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We state that we have had no previous contact with the journal regarding this submission.</li> <li>• We previously contacted the journal to inquire about/to check whether...</li> </ul>
Conflict of interests and financial disclosures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.</li> <li>• X.Y. advises Company A and has received lecture fees from Company B.</li> <li>• This study was supported by a grant from Z.</li> <li>• No financial support was received for this study/work.</li> </ul>
Authorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.B. conceived the study, analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript; C.D. analyzed the data...</li> <li>• All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to the journal.</li> <li>• All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Suggested reviewers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential reviewers for our manuscript are:</li> <li>• We believe that the following individual(s) would be well suited to reviewing our manuscript.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Request to exclude reviewers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We request that the following individual(s) not be approached to review our manuscript (because...).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concurrent/duplicate submissions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We declare that this manuscript has not been published before, in whole or in part, and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.</li> <li>• This study was presented in part at...</li> <li>• This study was previously published in Japanese (citation) and...</li> </ul>

## 6. Closing salutation and your contact information

- Briefly thank the journal editor for considering the manuscript and follow this with the full contact information of the corresponding author (name, academic degrees or professional qualifications; affiliation and postal address; telephone (and fax); email).
- Be sure to maintain a collegial tone to leave the journal editor with the best impression as he or she finishes reading your cover letter and moves on to evaluate your manuscript.
- Avoid statements that could be construed as presuming to give instructions to the editor. For example, “we look forward to your review of our manuscript” implicitly directs the editor to review your paper. Also, “[we look forward to hearing from you] at your earliest convenience/as soon as possible” implicitly directs the editor to communicate with you quickly; instead, simply use a neutral but polite phrase such as “we look forward to hearing from you” or “we look forward to hearing from you in due course”.
- A suitable closing salutation is “Sincerely,” or “Yours sincerely,”

### Summary

Although the cover letter is not, strictly speaking, a part of your manuscript, it can affect how your submission is perceived by the journal editor. A cover letter that is tailored to the journal, introduces your work persuasively, and is free from spelling and grammatical errors can help prime the editor to view your submission positively before he or she even looks over your manuscript.

We hope our tips and [Word template](#) can help you create professional, complete cover letters in a time-effective way. Our specialist editors, translators, and writers are available to help create or revise the content to be error-free and, as part of our additional [comprehensive Guidelines for Authors service](#), we can ensure the cover letter includes all of the statements required by the journal.

Lastly, just as a reminder for members of [ThinkSCIENCE’s free annual rewards program](#), remember to claim your reward of free editing or translation of one cover letter alongside editing or translation of a full paper before the end of the March!