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THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Writing a Good Cover Letter for Your Next Manuscript Submission

Many journals allow or require submission of a cover letter with a manuscript. A cover letter can increase the chances that your manuscript will be reviewed if it succinctly highlights why the manuscript is a good fit for publication in this particular journal. Below we present some tips for writing a good cover letter.

Who is the target audience for your cover letter?
Cover letters are for the benefit of the journal editor(s) who manage your manuscript and are generally not seen by reviewers. These letters are meant to get the editor(s) up to speed on the main findings – as well as on why these findings are significant and of interest to the journal's audience. Think of this as a second chance to get the important points across (in case the abstract is not clear enough).

General guidelines for writing a good cover letter

- Convey your enthusiasm (without exaggerating)
- Address the letter to the correct journal office
- Limit the letter to ~1 page unless there is "extra" information that requires more space, e.g., suggestions for reviewers and their contact information
- Write clearly and comply with any journal instructions (the editors might consider the cover letter a test of how well the authors follow instructions)

Content of a cover letter

- The major question that is addressed in the manuscript and why it is important
- The novelty and significance of the results to your field and the broader scientific community
- Information about a special need, e.g.,
  - Co-review with another manuscript
  - Technical expertise needed in reviewing this manuscript
- Reference to any prior discussion with the editorial team about potential submission of this manuscript
- Suggestions for appropriate reviewers, including contact information; the editors
  - Will likely find this helpful

Upcoming Opportunities

Have a question about writing grants or research articles? Contact us and we will attempt to answer it in a future newsletter.

Limited Submission Opportunity – NSF Major Research instrumentation
September 1 (Due date) | 12:00 pm
The Research Development Office (RDO) recently hosted a Zoom information session focused on NSF's long-standing Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) Program, to which major changes have been made. The session included an overview of the program solicitation, a summary of major changes and recent restrictions on subawardees, and insights from a previous MRI awardee.
View slides (HawkID authentication required)
Submit internal application

Write Winning Grant Proposals Seminar
October 26 | 8:30 am–5:00 pm | IMU Ballroom
The RDO is pleased to partner with Grant Writers' Seminars & Workshops (GWSW) on this seminar. Registration fee is $150 (includes seminar, workbook, supplemental materials, and lunch). Each college sponsors a certain number of faculty spots on a first come, first served basis. In-person and virtual options are available.
Additional information
Register here by October 8.

- ○ Though they might not choose more than one reviewer from your list
- Requests for exclusion of potential reviewers because of a possible conflict of interest (explain the reason and limit these to a few names)

You might also be expected to include any of the following (check the journal's guidelines)

- The name of the journal to which you are submitting
- The title of the manuscript
- Names and contact information of all authors
- Names of colleagues who have pre-reviewed the manuscript
- The article type
- A statement indicating that your manuscript has not already been published and is not under consideration by another journal, and that all authors have approved this submission
- Confirmation that you have no competing interests to disclose
- Other disclosures/statements that might be required by the journal

Good luck with the submission of your next manuscript!
Chris Blaumueller and the SERCC Team

Resources

- APA Style Manual – *Cover letters*
  - ○ Includes tips for writing the initial cover letter and a cover letter for resubmission
  - ○ Includes sample cover letters
- Author Services for Taylor and Francis – *How to write a cover letter for journal submission*
  - ○ Includes a cover letter example
- Nature Cell Biology – *Scientific communication: Writing up*, volume 13, page 1281 (2011)
- Springer – *Cover letters*
  - ○ Includes an example of a poor cover letter
- ThinkScience – *Writing effective cover letters for journal submissions: Tips and a Word template*
  - ○ Includes sample language
- Wordvice – *How to write a cover letter for journal submission*
  - ○ Includes an annotated template for a cover letter

Crash Course in NIH Grants Fundamentals
The NIH has curated playlists of its YouTube videos designed to provide an overview of the grants process, the funding programs available, key tools to use as you develop your application, and grant writing advice straight from NIH staff.
NIH Grants Fundamentals
NIH Funding Programs
Grant Application Tips
Full Collection

Town Hall on Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) NIH Data Management and Sharing (DMS) Pilot
NIH is collaborating with FDP on a DMS pilot. As part of Phase 1 of the pilot, during which standardized DMS Plan templates (including new web-based DMPTool templates) were tested, applicants and participating recipient institutions were invited to participate in recorded Town Halls between the FDP and the NIH staff.
Additional information
Recording of Town Hall

RDO Networking Surveys
Networking surveys create a directory to help identify potential collaborators for your ideas and projects. Currently, 11 topics are represented: 1) Aging Health, 2) Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning, 3) Climate Change/Sustainability, 4) COVID-19, 5) E-Cigarettes/Vaping, 6) Global Health, 7) Human-Technology Interface, 8) Mental Health, 9) Microfabrication/Nanofabrication, 10) Opioids, 11) Telehealth.
Complete the survey and see the results

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