

WRITING A COVER LETTER

THE GOAL OF A GOOD COVER LETTER.

The cover letter is your chance to lobby on behalf of your manuscript. **The letter is far from just a formality and should be written with the same care as your manuscript's text (if not more).** Ultimately, your cover letter is designed to influence the decision of the editor to send your manuscript out for peer review.

The letter will argue that your manuscript is a good fit for the journal you are submitting it to and highlight your most important findings. You should also assure the editor that there are no conflicts of interest that would affect the decision to publish your manuscript.

In the end, your cover letter should interest the editor enough to read your paper carefully and choose to send it for peer review.

Sometimes great science will be reviewed regardless of the cover letter, but a well written cover letter is useful for the vast majority of scientists who want to make their research stand out.

THE STRUCTURE OF A COVER LETTER.

A cover letter should be written like a standard business letter (see below). Address the editor formally by name, if known. Include your contact information, as well. This information is probably available through the journal's

online submission system, but it is proper to provide it in the cover letter, too.

Begin your cover letter with a paragraph that states the name of the manuscript and the names of the authors. You can also describe what type of manuscript your submission is (research article, review, case study, etc.). In this first paragraph and the next, describe the rationale behind your study and the major findings from your research. You can refer to prior work that you have published if it is directly related.

Next, write a short paragraph that explains why your manuscript would be a good fit for the journal. Do not simply state that your manuscript is “of interest to the field” or “novel.” Address specific aspects of the journal's Aims & Scope statement.

If the journal expresses interest in research with a clinical application, be sure to highlight the importance of your work in terms of clinical implications. If the journal mentions that it focuses on nanostructured materials, explain how your work involved such materials. Even if your work is not a perfect fit for the journal, be sure to address some of the Aims & Scope statement, and explain why your manuscript would be of interest to the journal's readers.

Finally, close with a brief paragraph indicating the following:

- The manuscript is original (i.e., you wrote it, not copied it)
- No part of the manuscript has been published before, nor is any part of it under consideration for publication at another journal
- There are no conflicts of interest to disclose
- List potential reviewers (*only if requested by the journal*)
- Mention any researchers who should NOT review your manuscript

Together, this information provides assurance to the editor that your manuscript merits consideration for publication in their journal and that you are interested specifically in their journal.

OTHER TIPS.

- You can get away with a little more flowery, grandiose speech in a cover letter than you can in your abstract or introduction. Grab the editor's attention!
- Use this letter to emphasize the highlights of your manuscript and tell why it would be exciting for that journal's readers.
- Don't use the letter as an opportunity to speak negatively about your competitors or address any researcher politics. Focus on the strength of your work and why others will want to read it.
- The cover letter can be the difference between an initial rejection and a manuscript being sent for peer review. Spend time writing your letter, and have a colleague proofread it before you send it. Remember to italicize the name of the journal and any species names.
- Some possible mistakes include irrelevant material (e.g., citing some of your prior studies that are not related), distracting details (e.g., listing sample sizes and p-values), and repetition of information

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

My Name
University of Research
804 Research Drive
Los Angeles, CA, USA 90210
310-555-1234
m.name@researchu.edu

Dr. John Editorian
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Science

August 3, 2012

Dear Dr. Editorian:

I am pleased to submit an original research article entitled “Neofunctionalization of polymerase rho in *Ustilago maydis*” by Albert Postdoc and My Name for consideration for publication in the *Journal of Science*. We previously uncovered a role for polymerase rho in DNA repair in *U. maydis* [citation], and this manuscript builds on our prior study to determine the evolution of this unique enzyme.

In this manuscript, we show that polymerase rho... [list a few important results].

We believe that this manuscript is appropriate for publication by the *Journal of Science* because it... [specific link to the journal’s aims & scope]. Our manuscript creates a paradigm for future studies of the evolution of essential enzymes in yeast.

This manuscript has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. We have no conflicts of interest to disclose, but we do respectfully request that Dr. Glen Meanie not review our manuscript. If you feel that the manuscript is appropriate for your journal, we suggest the following reviewers:

[list reviewers and contact info, if requested by the journal]

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,



My Name, PhD
Professor, Department of Evolutionary Mycology
University of Research



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mudrak is the Global Communications Manager at AJE, where he has worked since 2007. He graduated from Duke University with a PhD in Molecular Genetics and Microbiology and performed over eight years of research on pathogenic bacteria at Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to his current position, Dr. Mudrak led a number of webinars and workshops on academic writing and publishing as part of AJE's Author Education program.



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