

# Recommendations for Writing a Cover Letter

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## ABSTRACT

The cover letter is a brief document that is part of the manuscript submission process. Its purpose is to introduce the scientific work to the editor. The writing of the cover letter should be informative, clear, concise, and formal in tone. Depending on the journal's guidelines, it often requires statements regarding authorship agreements, conflicts of interest, funding, and ethical considerations. A well-crafted cover letter is the first step toward having the manuscript considered for review.

Below we provide a practical guide for writing an effective and professional cover letter for a medical scientific article.

**Key words:** manuscript, research studies, writing skills, editor, scientific journal, publication, scientific writing, author.

## RESUMEN

La carta de presentación es un breve documento que forma parte del proceso de envío de un manuscrito. Su propósito es presentar el trabajo científico al editor. La redacción de la carta de presentación debe ser informativa, clara, concisa, y en tono formal. Dependiendo de las normas de la revista se suelen requerir declaraciones sobre acuerdos de autor, conflictos de intereses, financiamientos y consideraciones éticas. Una carta de presentación bien elaborada es el primer paso para que el manuscrito sea considerado para su revisión.

A continuación, ofrecemos una guía práctica para escribir una carta de presentación eficaz y profesional para un artículo científico médico.

**Palabras clave:** manuscrito, estudios de investigación, habilidades de escritura, editor, revista científica, publicación, escritura científica, autor.

## INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a cover letter as “a letter that contains information about the item with which it is sent”<sup>1,2</sup>. A cover letter is a brief document, with an approximate length of half a page or 200 words, that forms part of the manuscript submission process<sup>1,3</sup>.

The cover letter is the first document read by an editor and represents the journal's first contact with the work<sup>4</sup>. In this regard, it is essential to highlight the relevance and originality of the article so that the editor can assess its suitability for the journal. A well-written cover letter provides the editor with a clear overview of the content and significance of the manuscript<sup>1</sup>.

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Received: 11/ 19/ 2024 Accepted: 09/ 24/2025

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.51987/revhospitalbaire.v45i4.417>

**How to cite:** Szyferman AY, Hilbert FE, Trincherio L, Carretero M, Posadas-Martínez ML. Recommendations for writing a cover letter. Rev Hosp Ital B Aires. 2025;45(4):e0000417.

The cover letter should be submitted together with the manuscript. It is advisable to write it once the manuscript is complete and has been carefully reviewed, in order to ensure that it accurately reflects the content of the work. In addition, it is important to verify that the letter complies with the journal's specific guidelines regarding format and content. Attention to these details demonstrates professionalism and may positively influence the editor's initial evaluation<sup>5</sup>.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Clear and Simple

The cover letter should be simple and direct, using plain and straightforward language<sup>6</sup>. Care must be taken when drafting it, as errors in structure or wording may result in the immediate rejection of the manuscript<sup>4</sup>. It is recommended to paraphrase the key aspects of the manuscript, avoiding verbatim repetition of the article's abstract. The focus should be on a clear presentation, without delving into highly technical details<sup>6</sup>, using accessible language and avoiding acronyms and/or jargon<sup>1</sup>. Only information related to the manuscript should be included, omitting personal details or references to other published manuscripts and academic achievements of the authors. Likewise, it is recommended not to mention or praise the editor for their achievements or professional success<sup>1</sup>.

### 2. Logical Structure

Although the structure of a cover letter may vary according to the journal's guidelines, it is important to maintain a logical organization in its writing<sup>1</sup>. In general, it is recommended to organize the letter into clearly defined sections:

#### Header

The most important element at the beginning of a cover letter is an appropriate opening salutation that includes the name of the journal's editor and the date of submission. A formal tone is recommended, using "Dear" followed by the editor's last name. It is important to thank the recipient for the opportunity to submit the cover letter, as well as for their interest in it<sup>1</sup>. It is essential to address the editor by name and ensure that both the editor's name and the journal's name are used correctly. Authors may frequently make mistakes by addressing the wrong editor or journal, especially when reusing a cover letter after rejection by another journal<sup>3</sup>.

#### Body

The body of the letter should be divided into short paragraphs, each focusing on key aspects of the manuscript. The first paragraph should present the main characteristics of the manuscript. It should include the title of the article, the section of the journal to which it is being submitted, the name of the journal, as well as the number of words, tables, and figures<sup>1</sup>.

The second paragraph should highlight the relevance of the topic addressed in the manuscript. It should explain why the work is important and what its contribution to the discipline is. In addition, it is recommended to mention the reason why the manuscript is being submitted to the selected journal and how its content may be of interest to its readership; for this reason, it is essential to be familiar with the journal's publications and scope<sup>1</sup>. Any conclusions mentioned must be supported by the data presented in the manuscript<sup>1,6</sup>. Table 1 presents some questions that may guide the writing of this paragraph<sup>7</sup>.

The third paragraph should include the authors' statement of agreement. It should indicate that the manuscript is original and clarify that it has not been submitted to other journals and will not be submitted elsewhere until a decision is received from the current journal. It should also state that all authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript, in compliance with the authorship criteria established by the ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors)<sup>1,8</sup>.

The fourth paragraph should include statements regarding conflicts of interest as well as the sources of funding received<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the ethics committee responsible for approving the study may be mentioned, along with a statement of permission in cases where previously published materials have been used<sup>1</sup>.

If required by the journal, it may also be stated that potential reviewers will be suggested, including their full names, institutional affiliations, and contact email addresses. Proposed reviewers must not have been co-authors with any of the manuscript's authors within the past five years. This indicates an effort to facilitate and contribute to the editorial process<sup>4</sup>.

#### Final

To conclude the cover letter, a closing salutation should be included, along with a brief expression of gratitude to the editor for taking the time to read the letter and consider the manuscript for publication. The authors' signatures should also be included, together with their contact information. Each signature should be accompanied by the author's full name, academic position, and institutional affiliation. Contact details may include a postal address, email address, or the preferred means of contact for each author<sup>1</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the cover letter is a fundamental tool for introducing a manuscript to a scientific journal, providing a first impression of the work and its relevance. Clear, concise, and well-organized writing can increase the likelihood that the manuscript will progress through the peer-review process.

By following the recommendations described, authors can highlight the most relevant aspects of their work, adequately present their contribution to science, and meet editorial expectations, thereby optimizing their chances of acceptance.

**Table 1.** Questions, with example answers, that may guide the writing of a cover letter for a scientific journal. Adapted from Yates<sup>7</sup>

Question	Example answer
Why is this study important?	This study is important because it provides new data on the influence of the microbiome on the development of chronic diseases, a field that is still poorly explored.
Was new information discovered with respect to a biological or clinical topic? Was this information new or was it measured in a different way?	Significant advances were identified related to antibiotic resistance in biofilms in hospital settings.
Were the results validated and verified?	The results were validated through replicated experimental studies in different laboratories using standardized methods to confirm their reliability.
What are the impacts of the research?	This study may help revolutionize personalized cancer therapies by providing new biomarkers that enable more specific treatments.
Who may be interested in this study?	Researchers in genetics, clinicians specializing in oncology, and professionals in pharmaceutical companies focused on targeted therapies.
Is the publication of this manuscript motivated by an editor?	Yes, the editor of the journal suggested submitting the manuscript after reviewing a summary presented at a recent symposium.

**Author contributions:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization (AYS, FEH, LT). Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project Administration (MC). Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project Administration (MLPM).

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the content of this work.

**Funding:** The authors declare that this study did not receive any funding from external sources.

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