Points to Remember When Creating a Cover Letter

Takako Kojima1) and J. Patrick Barron2)(14)

1) Assistant Professor, Department of International Medical Communications, Tokyo Medical University
2) Emeritus Professor, Tokyo Medical University
3) Member of Council, COPE
4) Adjunct Professor, Seoul National University Bundang Hospital

In our previous article in this series, we stressed the importance of creating a good cover letter when submitting manuscripts to international journals, and have discussed ways to effectively introduce the contents of a manuscript, in addition to how to select possible reviewers.1)

Despite the submission process being done primarily online, a cover letter is still a significant part of the process as it is the first document the editor-in-chief will come across, and one in which the author can emphasize the significance of the submitted manuscript as well as explain any concerns, (e.g. possibility of duplicate publication), the author may have regarding issues pertaining to the editorial and publication process and publication ethics. Therefore, it is advisable to spend considerable time creating a convincing cover letter and sharing it with the coauthors of the manuscript for their input.2)

The following is an example of what an effective cover letter might look like when submitting your manuscript for the first time. We will point out the important points to remember when writing cover letters by referring to each segment of the letter.

Example of a cover letter for submission

Jeffrey N. Wilson, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief
New Journal of Medicine

Dear Dr. Wilson,

On behalf of all authors, I would like you to consider our manuscript entitled “Hyperthermia in the treatment of hepatic cancer” for publication in the New Journal of Medicine as an original research paper. We feel that the findings described in this study will be of special interest to the readers of your journal because it describes a certain subset of NSCLC who are likely to respond positively to the new oral chemotherapeutic agent AAM.

This manuscript has not been published or submitted to your journal or others, either in whole or in part. Furthermore, we guarantee that the material will not be submitted for publication elsewhere until a decision has been made by you as to acceptability for publication.

At the appropriate place in your online submission system, we have suggested 6 potential reviewers and have provided their contact information.

All authors have contributed significantly, are in agreement with the content of the manuscript, and have approved this submission.

Yours sincerely,
Ichiro Suzuki, M.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Surgery
Tokyo ABC University

Fig. 1
• Important points

① After the salutation “Dear” at the beginning of the letter, use only the last name. A very common mistake is writing “Dear Dr. Jeffrey N. Wilson”. However, if you have met the author, and are on a first-name basis, then “Dear Jeffrey” would be preferable.

② Specify the type of manuscript that is being submitted such as an original research paper, case report, letter to the editor etc.

③ Give a short introduction (any interesting or unusual conclusions, if any) of the submitted manuscript. In particular, if the conclusions of your paper have any specific clinical significance, emphasize those.

④ A statement clarifying the originality of the work (no duplicate submission, no duplicate publication)

⑤ A statement notifying that you and your coauthors have suggested possible reviewers. It is not absolutely necessary to give the names and contact information here, as this information will be provided in the appropriate place of the online submission system, but mentioning it here indicates you are trying to contribute to the smooth operation of the editorial process.

⑥ A statement that all authors took part in the work and agree with the content and the submission. Some journals may ask for the specific contributions of each author. If this is the case, the information could be provided as follows:

Example (if the coauthors initials were AT, and MK)

The manuscript was written collaboratively by IS, AT and MK.  
Tabulation of the data was the responsibility of AT. 
Statistical analysis was primarily the work of IS and MK. 
All the authors agreed to submission.

⑦ A statement disclosing any conflict of interest even if the journal requires a separate COI disclosure form.

⑧ This part can be omitted since information concerning the corresponding author will be provided in the appropriate place of the online submission system.

Cover letter for resubmission

The following is an example of what a cover letter might look like, when you are resubmitting your manuscript after making revisions based on comments from the reviewers.

Jeffrey N. Wilson, M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief  
New Journal of Medicine

Dear Dr. Wilson,

We would like to thank you very much for considering publication of our manuscript entitled “Hypothermia in the treatment of hepatic cancer” for publication in the New Journal of Medicine as an original research paper. ① We would also like to thank the reviewers for putting in the time and effort to provide us with very valuable and detailed comments. ② We have revised our manuscript accordingly and feel that the reviewers’ comments have helped us to improve the manuscript considerably. ③

Yours sincerely,

Ichiro Suzuki, M.D.

Fig. 2

• Important points

① Thank the editor-in-chief for considering the publication of your manuscript.

② Give a word of appreciation to the reviewers for taking the time to review the manuscript voluntarily in their own free time.
Inform the editor-in-chief that you and your coauthors have made revisions based on comments received from the reviewers, and that by making those changes, it has improved the quality of your manuscript, as this is generally the case.

Closing message

The cover letter you submit should be simple and “to the point” because you need to provide all essential information in the letter, which should not be longer than necessary. In the next article, we will discuss how to mention specific concerns, such as the possibility of duplicate publication, in the cover letter.

References

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