Description

When considering submitting their research paper to one or more journals, it is a good idea for authors to send pre-submission inquiries to the editorial team. These inquiries are valuable to both the author and the journal editors because they initiate dialogue between them to iron out any queries about the research and whether it fits the journal's area of interest. In addition, pre-submissions give authors the opportunity to approach more than one journal at a time.

Does sending a pre-submission guarantee that the manuscript will get accepted? No, it does not, and authors should take note of the journal-specific instructions and protocols that are outlined before submitting the inquiry. Otherwise, it can prove to be a waste of time for both the authors and the journal staff.

How Do Pre-submission Inquiries Help Authors and Editors?

Authors should keep in mind the purpose of their pre-submission inquiry, which is to inform journal editors of the scope, subject matter, and research findings of the study. Journal editors assess the presentation to determine whether the research fits with their area of discipline. Each journal might have different protocols for submitting pre-submission inquiries. For example, for submission to *PLOS Computational Biology,* it is mandatory for authors to submit a pre-submission inquiry for "methods" papers, which focus on the methods used in specific fields of research. In this case, pre-submission inquiries would detail how the method is important and already being widely used, and whether any revisions have been made to it, and why they were necessary and important. The authors would be required to describe in detail, aspects such as the issue to be researched using specific methods, its relevance for a specific audience and how it is better than current methods. Some journal editors also encourage authors to submit the manuscript outline as a supplement so that they can assess them better.

In contrast, *PLoS Biology* encompasses a broad range of subjects in the biological sciences and asks that authors submit inquiries with information about all parts of the manuscript. Unlike *PLOS Computational Biology*, *PLoS Biology* requires authors to provide details on the background, methods, results, and conclusions in their pre-submission inquiry, and although the abstract might contain most of this information, it alone is not detailed enough for a pre-submission inquiry. Some journals don't necessarily require a pre-submission inquiry; however, the editors do recognize the importance of authors seeking their advice in advance and prefer that pre-submission inquiries include an abstract with a cover letter that "explains the main focus or findings of the manuscript, and outlines the significance of the reported advance for the field."

Although journals differ in their instructions intended for pre-submission inquiries, the idea is to ensure that authors provide sufficient information for the editors to make a sound decision about accepting the manuscript for review. Dialogue between the editors and authors is particularly important for the authors during this process and it is advisable for the authors to be prepared with their pre-submission inquiries. It is also important to keep in mind that those who assess the pre-submission inquiries are looking for something novel. The editors are not likely to approve the inquiry if authors provide only one

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bit of evidence to their conclusions; editors would like to see very definite conclusions that are backed by several pieces of evidence and data.

What to Include in a Pre-submission Inquiry

Regardless of the target journal, all pre-submission inquiries should provide a cover letter that details how the manuscript would be a valuable addition to currently published research. Authors must bear in mind that the editors require as much information as possible to assess whether the research fits their journal's scope. Pre-submission inquiries that lack information, such as whether the manuscript had previously been rejected, might cause editors to question the author's honesty and why this piece of information was purposely left out.

Adis, who publishes journals focused on disciplines such as the pharmaceutical industry and drug-related issues in health-related fields, has provided a presentation entitled "How to get the best out of presubmission inquiries." According to Adis, the best approach would be to provide the full manuscript; however, if that is not possible, pre-submission inquiries should focus on providing key information according to the type of paper. For example, if the research is a review, authors might be able to provide just a draft manuscript or an outline; however, if the manuscript is a case report, authors must provide further details.

The following points should be considered while drafting any pre-submission inquiry; however, authors must always check with the target journal about their protocol:

- *Cover letter*. Use specific editor's name if possible. Avoid addressing the letter generically. Provide a synopsis of the research and explain why it's important.
- *Draft paper*. A draft of the final manuscript is a valuable supplement to the cover letter and provides editors with detailed references to the claims specified in the inquiry.
- *History of your paper*. Mention details of previous submission history. If the manuscript was rejected by another journal, make sure to provide that information.
- *Significance of your research*. Highlight the significance of the research study. Editors are interested to know how the study is novel and what contribution it makes to the research comunity.
- *Previous work*. Specify details of previously presented data and mention the contribution the study makes.
- *Results of study*. Explain the results of the research in detail (e.g., how many observations made, scope of the study area, how many methods, etc.).

What Happens Next?

In most cases, editorial staff review the paper for its suitability to the journal. Responses usually take only about one week, but could be delayed if further consultations with members of the editorial board are necessary. Authors will either be rejected at this point or be invited to submit their full manuscripts, at which time the manuscript would be assessed further and peer reviewers will be assigned.

Category

1. Publishing Research

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2. Submitting Manuscripts

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