

nature neuroscience

Welcome aboard!

Nature Neuroscience editors share useful tips on the initial submission process.

After months of running experiments and analyzing data, you are ready to submit your paper. But are you truly ready to hit the 'Submit' button? When you look at the journal's submission guidelines, it can be hard to know which ones matter the most. We won't hold it against you if your manuscript does not fully satisfy our format and style guidelines, provided it has a reasonable length and structure, but it never hurts to put your best foot forward. Here we provide some simple recommendations to help the initial submission process go as smoothly as possible. Some readers might find these tips obvious, but we hope that even experts will appreciate these gentle reminders.

It can be challenging to compress months, or years, of your work into a single manuscript, but it is very important that you aim to tell your story in the best way possible. Clarity and brevity are your strongest allies. Draw readers in with an interesting title that highlights the main point of the paper. Your abstract should be clear and concise, providing a big picture view of the work. Present your results logically and be sure to make your interpretations compelling, but measured. Prepare your figures with care and ensure that they effectively convey your message. Use them to highlight your most important and convincing data, making them as self-explanatory as possible, so the reader can get the gist of the paper from a scan through the figures. Scholarship is important; be sure that the reference list is as accurate and complete as possible. Although this may sound trivial, be sure to paginate your manuscript and present your figures with their legends. The paper will be easier to read and evaluate, and it's less likely that important details will be missed. And don't forget *Nature Neuroscience's* broad audience; aim to present your work in a way that is accessible to all neuroscientists. Do not hesitate to ask your colleagues, ideally those not directly in your field, for candid comments on your paper.

Consider the best format for your paper. We currently offer four types of research article formats: Brief Communications, Articles, Technical Reports and Resources. These are described in our Guide to Authors and examples can be found in recent issues of the journal. As we often see some confusion as to what constitutes a Brief Communication, we'll comment on this format here. Brief Communications are reports of surprising new discoveries with high potential to quickly stimulate research in new directions. They are not merely preliminary versions of a typical Article. A helpful rule of thumb is that we are looking for provocative 'one-liners' featuring thought-provoking results or findings that strongly challenge existing views in the field.

Submissions should include a cover letter. This letter will never be shared outside of the editorial office and therefore represents a privileged space to communicate with the editor. Use it to your advantage. Don't merely duplicate the content of your manuscript; you should aim to convey the key elements of your work and tell us how it advances the field. Here you can suggest reviewers that you feel are

appropriate for your paper and also exclude referees. We'll consider your suggestions and we always honor exclusions. Do let us know if you are aware of competing work or if you have a related manuscript submitted, in preparation or in press.

Although not a pre-requisite, you might want to consider including our Supplementary Methods Checklist at the time of submission (http://www.nature.com/neuro/pdf/sm_checklist.pdf). We will need you to fill out this document if we decide to send your paper out to review, on average 1 week after submission. This checklist can also be useful to think about proper methods and statistics reporting while you are still preparing your manuscript. For more detailed information on best practices in statistics, please consult NPG's recently launched 'Statistics for biologists' web collection, which provides practical advice on statistical analysis and data representation and links to useful resources (<http://www.nature.com/collections/qghhqm>).

At the time you prepare your manuscript, you should also consider whether you want to take advantage of our recent double-blind peer review option (<http://www.nature.com/news/nature-journals-offer-double-blind-review-1.16931>). You will need to indicate this preference at the time of submission and make sure that the manuscript is written in a way that doesn't reveal your identity.

If you are still at an early stage in the preparation of your manuscript and are wondering whether it's appropriate for *Nature Neuroscience*, you can contact us to seek our advice. We usually answer such pre-submission inquiries within a few days. You should aim to distill the essence of your study into a brief letter, providing a concise summary of the main findings, experimental approaches and conceptual advance. Feel free to include one key figure and a few references to add some context. Although we are happy to provide some guidance in advance of submission, the more information we have, the easier it is to evaluate your paper. So if you have the manuscript ready to go, we encourage you to proceed with formal submission instead.

We're happy to answer questions. Please feel free to contact us as you prepare for submission if there's something you're unsure about (http://www.nature.com/neuro/about/about_ed/index.html). Once you have submitted your paper, we will strive to make the editorial process as swift, helpful and transparent as possible. In the case that your manuscript is unsuccessful at the journal, it may quickly find a home at another NPG journal via our transfer platform. Please note that this is a service that we offer on an opt-out basis. If you prefer that we do not discuss your study with editors at other NPG journals, we won't; the choice is entirely yours. Just let us know when you submit your paper.

Having followed these simple recommendations during the preparation of your manuscript, you can now comfortably sit back, press the 'Submit' button and relax. Welcome aboard *Nature Neuroscience*! ■