

Dear Authors: We Do Read Your Cover Letters

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Serving as an Associate Editor (AE), Senior Associate Editor (SAE), and now, Editor-in-Chief (EIC) for *JAOCS* has provided me with some unique insights into scientific publishing. Over this time the number of submissions to *JAOCS* has significantly increased, reviewers and editors are overburdened, and there is more competition to publish within the pages of *JAOCS* and other journals. One goal of *JAOCS* editors is to find and publish novel and quality research that answers important scientific questions that are within the journal's scope and interest to its readership.

With this in mind, when a manuscript is submitted to *JAOCS* the manuscript goes to me, the EIC. Upon receipt, the first thing I do is get a sense of the manuscript's merit by reading the title, abstract, and cover letter followed by browsing the materials and methods section, conclusion,

and the attached iThenticate report (plagiarism detection software). These initial steps allow me as an editor to become familiar with the subject matter of the manuscript, form a first impression, raise questions concerning the manuscript, and make an important determination as to the manuscript's overall value and whether further effort should be taken to enter the manuscript into the editorial and peer-review process, or whether the manuscript should be declined without further consideration.

Wait, did you say you read the cover letter? Yes, I actually read the manuscript's cover letter. In fact, I also encourage the SAEs and AEs of *JAOCS* to read the cover letter before further review takes place. But why? The cover letter serves as an important persuasive tool in an author's arsenal. Used effectively, it provides an excellent opportunity for the author to communicate and lobby directly with the editor and grab their attention. The cover letter introduces the manuscript and supplies critical insights into the merits of the work to the editors. A concisely written cover letter is a valuable document that summarizes the research for editors and reviewers and may make the difference between a granted peer-review or outright rejection.

What kind of information should be included in a well-written cover letter? The body of the cover letter should give background information and context for the research in a brief sentence or two. Next, it should answer important questions like, why is the study important and relevant to the fats and oils field? What gaps in knowledge are being answered by this piece of research? What is novel about this work that has not been previously recognized or published? What are the major experimental results and findings of your research? What are potential future implications of the study and why will the work will be of interest to *JAOCS* readers? How does the work fit the scope of *JAOCS*? If the authors have previously published similar

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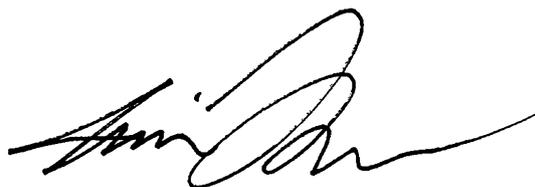
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studies, a mention of how the submitted manuscript builds upon or extends upon this published work is quite useful. In these instances, I routinely notice that authors make no mention of previously published work that is similar nor make reference to it within their manuscript. This can raise serious questions and doubts, for example, salami slicing, [1] by an editor concerning the redundancy and suitability of the work.

This information can help me assign it to the best-equipped editors to handle the manuscript and even help the editors find other scientists best suited to serve as reviewers. Of course the cover letter also should contain mandatory statements concerning the originality of the study, that the manuscript has not been previously published or submitted for consideration to another journal and that all the authors have seen, read, and understood *JAACS* copyright and submission guidelines and have given their approval. Hopefully, these mandatory requirements are evident to all *JAACS* authors.

Regrettably, few authors seem to be aware of the actual impact that a cover letter –or lack thereof– can have. While such vital information can be conveyed within the cover letter, unfortunately, most cover letters that I currently see (if one is even included) only state the title of the manuscript, the authors desire to submit the manuscript to the journal, and that all the authors have approved the manuscript. Rarely, do I see a cover letter that states the importance and potential impact of the research. Can you say missed opportunity? By not including the vital information mentioned above in a cover letter, you potentially jeopardize your case as to why your manuscript should be examined further.

Conducting research and writing manuscripts is a difficult undertaking. Writing a cover letter takes time and thought. As a scientist, you've invested a great deal of time and effort and that of your colleagues and students in completing the research and preparing a manuscript. Considering this effort, your goal should be to show the editor and reviewers how your research is important. Currently, a cover letter is not mandatory for *JAACS* submissions; however, please take extra time to ensure that the manuscript stands the best possible chance of being placed in the editorial process, peer-reviewed, and being published in *JAACS*. Write that cover letter!



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Editor-in-Chief
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Reference

1. Factsheet salami slicing. Available at Elsevier publishing campus. <https://www.publishingcampus.elsevier.com/pages/63/ethics/Publishing-ethics.html>. Accessed 16 August 2016