Before clicking the 'submit' button

Putting together a manuscript is an involved process. Here we provide some tips for preparing your manuscript for *Nature Cancer*.

Preparing a manuscript for submission is a central but also time-consuming part of the publication process. Beyond data collection and analysis, deciding on the most appropriate data presentation, writing the manuscript and navigating journal policies and submission guidelines is not always straightforward. To simplify the process, we provide detailed guidance for [preparing](#) and [submitting](#) your manuscript to *Nature Cancer*. We have distilled our key recommendations here, on the basis of questions that we frequently receive from prospective authors.

A great paper relies on great research, so the focus should always remain on the strength and quality of the data that support the study's conclusions. All research projects need to have robust experimental design and high standards for reproducibility of experiments and data reporting. To that end, the [Reporting Summary and Editorial Policy Checklist](#) of the Nature journals — documents that request information on key aspects of experimental and analytical design and policy compliance — can act as useful guides from the inception of a project to the final manuscript submission prior to publication, regardless of whether *Nature Cancer* is the authors' journal of choice or not. Authors may wish to include these filled-out documents with their first submission to our journal, although we mandate this only for papers we decide to formally review, as it aids both editors and referees through the peer-review process. In general, compliance with [policy and reporting guidelines](#) is essential for successful peer review and publication of a study in *Nature Cancer*.

It is also essential to give [authorship](#) credit where it is due, by including in the author list all researchers who contributed substantially to the manuscript, and by having all co-authors discuss and agree on the submission's content and author order. Although *Nature Cancer* editors are not involved in authorship decisions in any way, we do require that papers include detailed author contribution statements that outline the role(s) of each person signing the paper.

When preparing the manuscript, it is important to keep in mind the target audience. For *Nature Cancer* this means addressing a broad readership of cancer researchers and oncologists. Going over the

journal's [aims and scope](#) can help confirm that the paper falls under our purview and interests. For clinical research, we strongly recommend consulting the [dedicated page](#) on our website to ensure that all relevant guidelines are followed. Tied to this is selecting the most appropriate format for the paper. We offer a range of primary research [content types](#) for the optimal presentation of diverse findings in a way that makes them more accessible to readers. Among these are Articles (a long but flexible format that permits reporting of different types of research) and Brief Communications (a short format that focuses on striking findings, the rapid reporting of which could benefit the cancer community). Technical Reports present new techniques or substantial refinement or extension of existing methodology that would have broad utility in the field. Resources cater to large-scale datasets of high value and significance for the community. Finally, Analysis papers typically report new analyses of existing data that lead to significant novel conclusions. However, format choice can be flexible for first submissions and is finalized by the editor closer to publication, in consultation with both authors and referees.

Regardless of the content type, the study should have a compelling narrative thread, synthesizing the data in a manner that allows readers to follow conclusions logically, contextualize findings and appreciate their implications. It is equally important that this be done in a measured and accurate manner, avoiding *a priori* preferred narratives that are not strictly guided by the data. Instead, this narrative thread should start with the figures, each of which should present the essential data that illustrate the message of the figure title. It is generally advisable to be selective when deciding which data to present in the paper, including those presented as supplementary information. Data that are too preliminary or peripheral to the main message should be omitted. Nevertheless, we permit up to ten Extended Data figures that complement the main figures with additional important information. In principle, well-prepared figures together with their captions should be sufficient to guide readers through the main findings, even before they read the manuscript text. Linked to optimal

figure presentation is the provision of clear and detailed methods. Consulting our [editorial policies](#) on data presentation and reporting is essential to achieving both these objectives. To help authors provide all essential methodological information, we do not impose upper word limits for this section, with the average *Nature Cancer* paper having ~3,000 words in the Methods section, rivaling the length of the main text itself.

When writing, it helps to think of the title and abstract as the 'face' of the paper: the elements that make it discoverable and memorable by summarizing the main message accurately and succinctly in a manner that entices others to read it. The main text should be written in a similar manner, aiming to make the paper clear and accessible to the wide readership of the journal. Among the key considerations are putting the findings in the context of prior research by citing all relevant literature and discussing both their limitations and their implications, thereby explaining how the study extends prior knowledge in a meaningful manner, without stretching conclusions. Before submission, getting the input of colleagues whose work is outside the direct focus of the paper can help sharpen both data presentation and manuscript writing. Conforming to our formatting style is not essential for a first submission to our journal. For example, exceeding our recommended text length or not following our preferred reference list formatting is not important for our editorial assessment. However, it is always to the authors' benefit to consider text length and dataset size, as overlong, unwieldy papers typically require extensive textual and presentational revisions closer to publication.

Before submission it is also important to decide whether to opt in to our double-blind peer-review scheme that permits authors to remain anonymous to the referees, as in this case the authors are responsible for ensuring that the manuscript will not give away their identity. Authors may also decide to upload the manuscript as a preprint, something that we encourage¹. To that end, we facilitate preprint deposition to the Research Square platform through our 'In Review' initiative, but authors are free to upload the originally submitted version of the paper to their

preferred preprint server at any time during the peer-review process.

Although it is not mandatory, it is customary that a manuscript submission be accompanied by a cover letter addressed to the journal. This letter should be seen as an opportunity for a less formal interaction with the editor to explain the key striking findings of the paper and highlight its broader significance and suitability for our journal. As the cover letter is confidential between authors and editors, it is also the place to include sensitive information, such as potential competition and referee suggestions and exclusions.

If while preparing the paper you are uncertain about its suitability for *Nature Cancer*, sending a presubmission enquiry can help gauge the journal's interest in

receiving a full submission. We formally handle presubmission enquiries through our submission system and, as they aim to give the editor a sense of the paper in a succinct manner, thereby ensuring a rapid editorial response, they should include limited information (typically a cover letter and abstract and, less frequently, also a figure deck). However, it can be hard to condense all that is striking about a study in such a limited space. Thus, if the paper is ready and is not under consideration elsewhere, we recommend uploading it as a full submission to permit us to make a fully informed decision on the basis of the complete manuscript.

Once the paper is submitted, the handling editor will guide authors through the editorial assessment and [peer-review process](#)².

The recommendations we provide here may seem intuitive to some readers, but we hope that even seasoned authors will find some of these tips useful. In general, you should feel free to [get in touch](#) with us during the manuscript preparation and submission process if you have questions or would like to discuss the paper in more detail. We are always happy to hear from our authors, and we look forward to welcoming your submissions at *Nature Cancer*.

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References

1. *Nat. Cancer* **1**, 1025–1026 (2020).
2. *Nat. Cancer* **2**, 773–774 (2021)