

Better pre-submission inquiries

Pre-submission inquiries are a means to quickly interact with journal editors to find a suitable outlet for a manuscript in preparation. To make the most out of these interactions, this Editorial outlines key points that should ideally be covered in a pre-submission inquiry.

A pre-submission inquiry — or, as we call these in the editorial office, a presub — is a short letter sent by a prospective author to journal editors to gauge their potential interest in considering a manuscript. Although they are optional, presubs are a useful way to decide where to submit a manuscript in preparation: they help authors to find out whether the paper fits within the scope and mission of a journal; allow them to rapidly explore multiple choices of journals without committing to one at a time; and can potentially lead to some editorial feedback and advice.

In 2021, *Nature Aging* received close to 140 pre-submission inquiries, and it took us on average 3 to 4 days to respond. Many of the presubs that we received were limited to a short salutatory paragraph, a title and an abstract, which did not always allow us to make a meaningful recommendation. Although presubs should be quick and easy to prepare, they should ideally contain key information to make the most out of these informal interactions. We share below our recommendations on what a presub to the journal should ideally include (Box 1).

As editors, we are often asked how we make decisions on whether to consider a primary research manuscript for peer review. The short answer is that we read the paper, write a summary of the study's findings, and place those in the context of what is already known to determine whether the study addresses an important gap in the literature and how interesting it will be to the broad audience of the journal. When evaluating a presub, we only have partial information and are therefore trying to make some predictions as to what the full paper will offer. So, what type of information will be most useful to us to make accurate predictions?

In addition to a title and abstract, an ideal inquiry should include a more elaborate presentation of the study in the form of a cover letter (typically one or two pages long), possibly alongside a single display item. The letter should start with a brief introduction of the research question, what motivated it and why answering it is important to the field. The next section should summarize the key findings, and, importantly, it

Box 1 | What makes an ideal presub?

- A brief introduction of the research question and what motivated it
- A summary of the key results that includes the most important information about the approaches, design and methodologies
- A short discussion of the interpretations and implications of the work that includes a sentence explaining why the work is important and of interest to the journal's audience
- A short list of key references (10 or fewer) that provide the context necessary to gauge how the work advances the field
- Optional, but recommended: a figure depicting some of the key results or data of the study

should also describe some aspects of the methodology and design. Broad strokes are usually sufficient, but do include the key experimental approaches used. Sometimes a better methodology or design compared to previous studies can represent an important advance in and of itself. Mention whether any new tools were used or developed. Make it clear what findings were obtained *in vitro* or *in vivo*. Specify the model systems used or whether human participants were involved (and, if so, include key demographic information). Given the focus of the journal, it is particularly important to state the age range studied. If the paper reports the results of a clinical trial, provide the registration number and registry. If the study has any particular technical strengths, these should be mentioned as well. For an epidemiological study for instance, this could be a large sample size, a longitudinal design, a strong demonstration of the generalizability of the findings or a focus on an under-represented population. The final section should situate the value of the new findings in the light of previous knowledge and capture the conceptual advance offered by the study. Does it feature a new and well-supported mechanistic insight; represent an important contribution to evidence-based medicine; provide a valuable resource; or develop a new technique or tool — to give a non-exclusive list.

The presub should be referenced, and therefore feature a short list of the most relevant publications (10 or fewer) that frame the conceptual advance. Be forthcoming about published studies that may have already reported similar findings, including your own previous work. If

applicable, mention any other unpublished manuscripts from your group that are strongly related and are already, or soon will be, under consideration in a peer-reviewed journal.

Often presubs are made just before or at the time of manuscript preparation. If figures are available, consider including a single figure that presents some of the key results.

Feel free to suggest or ask about the best type of article format for your work (see [here](#) for a full list). However, this is not critically important at this stage, as the appropriate format can be determined later on (at the time of submission of the full paper or after peer review).

When you are ready to submit your presub, please use our online [manuscript tracking system](#) rather than an email. Try to avoid submitting the full manuscript. We won't turn away a presub with a full paper attached (or with a link to the paper on a preprint server) but we will only be able to look at the paper succinctly as we reserve in-depth editorial evaluations for formal submissions.

Editorial decisions on presubs are non-binding. A negative response does not preclude the submission of a full paper or its consideration for peer review at the journal; similarly, an invitation to submit the full paper does not always guarantee that we will send the paper out for peer review. Ultimately, those decisions are made after reading the full paper. But hopefully, the recommendations included here will help us all to make the most out of presubs. □

Published online: 18 March 2022
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43587-022-00199-8>