

How to Write a Persuasive Cover Letter

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Higher School of Economics, 2019

How to **USE** a Persuasive Cover Letter **Strategically**

**** Amended Version ****

Original Abstract

- Getting published requires more than producing a good manuscript. Scholars must also be able to “sell” their work. Writing a persuasive cover letter is the first step.
- To that end, this workshop has three major goals: to review general guidelines, to demonstrate the importance of a rhetorical perspective, and to begin the drafting process.
- Specifically, participants will review sample letters, analyze the use of persuasive language, and begin work on a template letter. If participants have cover letter drafts already, they are encouraged to bring them. If not, a template will be provided.

- Getting published requires more than producing a good manuscript. Scholars must also be able to “sell” their work. Writing a persuasive cover letter is the **first step**.
- Yes, but I would like to emphasize using it as a step *before* you’re finished writing the manuscript.

- To that end, this workshop has three major goals: to review general guidelines, to demonstrate the importance of a rhetorical perspective, and to begin the drafting process.
- To review guidelines
- To demonstrate the importance of a rhetorical perspective
- To begin the drafting process

- Specifically, participants will review sample letters, analyze the use of persuasive language, and begin work on a template letter. If participants have cover letter drafts already, they are encouraged to bring them. If not, a template will be provided.
- Analysis of persuasive language
- Sample letter
- Begin drafts

Three claims

1. Writing a cover letter is an important practice, but I would argue it is more important during the manuscript-drafting portion of your research, not during the submission
2. The most important takeaway for me –while researching and creating this talk—is that authors must establish AND demonstrate the connection/fit/relevance of their article to that field or publication.
3. I've tried to organize *this* presentation in a way that represents the persuasive style I'm discussing. I hope this talk/workshop itself can act as a model for you.

Agenda

- Introductions
- Three parts (including two breaks)
 - General guidelines and rhetoric
 - Cover Letter guidelines and feedback from experts!
 - Drafting Letters
- Conclusions


...if we finish early, that's okay

Two breaks. 10 minutes each.

Introductions!!

What are you
passionate
about right
now?

www.weand.me



What is a goal
you plan on
accomplishing
this year?

www.weand.me

General Guidelines and Rhetoric

Part 1

What is good writing?

How to write good...

1. Avoid alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid clichés like the plague. (They're old hat.)
4. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
5. One should never generalize.
6. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
7. Be more or less specific.
8. Sentence fragments? Eliminate.
9. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
10. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
11. Who needs rhetorical questions?

(Adapted from Frank Visco's *Writer's Digest* article in 1986)

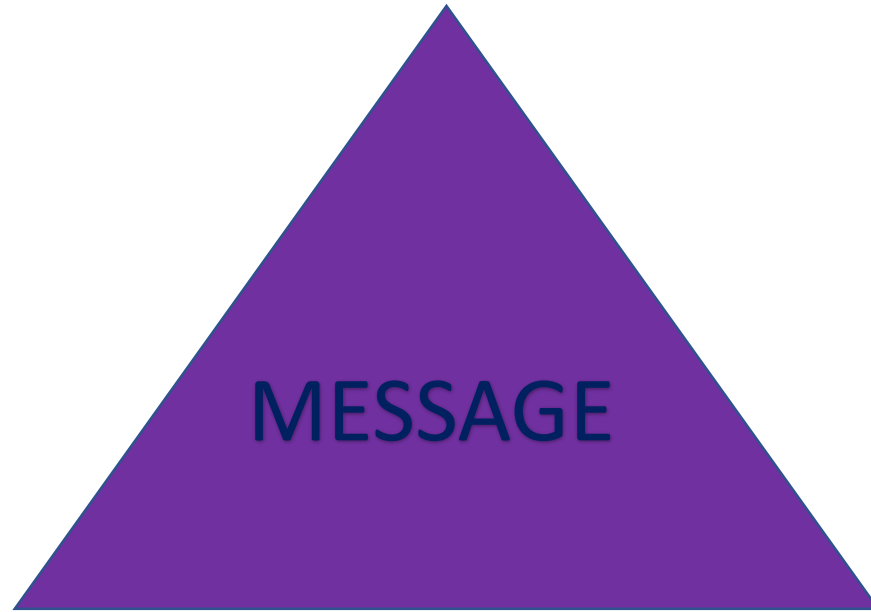
It depends.

Is the author **effective** in
achieving his/her purpose?

The Rhetorical Situation and Context

The circumstances/environment

Author



Audience

Purpose

Яндекс

директ







Ethos

Pathos



MESSAGE

Logos

Kairos

- Author's trustworthiness
- Author's **background** or authority
(e.g., a doctor writing about medical field)
 - Fairness
 - Credibility

ETHOS

A solid yellow square is located in the bottom right corner of the slide.



By **JAMIE DUCHARME** August 31, 2018



For more, visit *TIME Health*.

Research has shown time and time again that **being grateful is good for your health**, mood and general well-being. In fact, it's one of the easiest things you can do to **increase your mental health**. But if you can't remember the last time you sent a real thank-you note, a recent study may explain why.

The research, published recently in *Psychological Science*, says people chronically underestimate the power of expressing gratitude and overestimate how awkward it will be, which may keep them from engaging in the simple but impactful practice.



jamie ducharme credentials



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[Jamie Ducharme - Staff Writer - Time Magazine | LinkedIn](#)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jamie-ducharme-a104ba68> ▼

View **Jamie Ducharme's** full profile. ... I cover a wide range of health topics — from medical research and public health to relationships and psychology — for TIME magazine and Time.com. I also contribute to magazine packages, TIME Health special editions and breaking news ...

[Jamie Ducharme - Boston Magazine](#)

<https://www.bostonmagazine.com/author/jamie-ducharme/> ▼

Originally from Manchester, New Hampshire, **Jamie Ducharme** studied journalism at Northeastern University. She's never met a group fitness class she won't try. ... Five Boston wellness pros share their secrets to enjoying without overindulging during the most wonderfully gluttonous time ...

[Jamie Ducharme | Wiki & Bio | Everipedia](#)

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May 25, 2018 - **Jamie Ducharme's** wiki: **Jamie Ducharme** is an American journalist based in ...
Reference Links For This **Biography** Links to historical reviews, ...

[Jamie Ducharme | Time](#)

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Missing: **redentials** | Must include: **redentials**



Jamie Ducharme ✓ VERIFIED

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Staff writer [@TIME](#) covering health. before that: [@bostonmagazine](#) Email: jamie.ducharme@time.com

- Appeals to logic/intellect
 - Examples, facts, research, statistics, testimony



LOGOS



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Research has shown time and time again that **being grateful is good for your health**, mood and general well-being. In fact, it's one of the easiest things you can do to **increase your mental health**. But if you can't remember the last time you sent a real thank-you note, a recent study may explain why.

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Research Article



Undervaluing Gratitude: Expressers Misunderstand the Consequences of Showing Appreciation



Amit Kumar and Nicholas Epley

Booth School of Business, The University of Chicago

Psychological Science

1–13

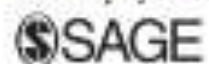
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DOI: 10.1177/0956797618772506

www.psychologicalscience.org/PS



- Attention to the values and beliefs of the intended audience
- Appeals to emotion
 - Emotionally-charged language
 - Figurative language
 - Use of stories/images

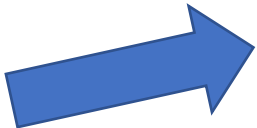
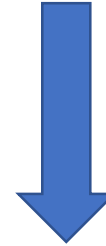
PATHOS



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- 
- Refers to the “timeliness” of an argument
 - Often, for a message to be successful, it needs to come at the right time

KAIROS



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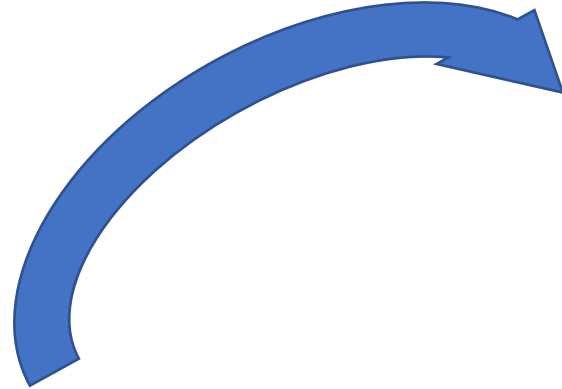
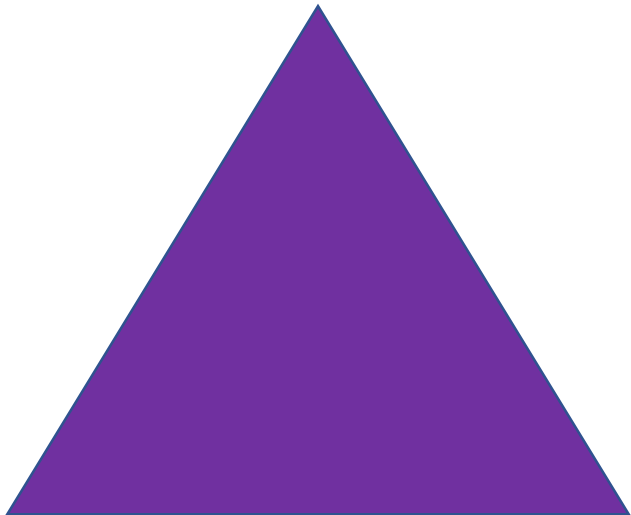
The research, published **recently** in *Psychological Science*, says people chronically underestimate the power of expressing gratitude and overestimate how awkward it will be, which may keep them from engaging in the simple but impactful practice.

Is it effective?

Author

Audience

Purpose



Ethos

Logos

Pathos

Kairos





Cover Letter Guidelines

Part 2

Please take 5-7 minutes to read
the article

Overview of structure

Introductory
Material

Salutation

- Use the current editor's name – and spell it correctly.
- Follow guidelines for a business letter

Paragraph 1 / 2

Context

- Name of manuscript
- Type of manuscript (e.g., research article, review, case study, etc.)
- Rationale of study and major findings
- Name(s) of author(s)

Paragraph 2 / 3

The “fit”

- Explain why your work is a good fit for this particular journal
- Tailor your message to this group
- Demonstrate that you understand the values/priorities of this journal

- Why would your paper be of interest to the readers of that journal?
- Explain which section of the target journal would be most appropriate for your manuscript (e.g., Original Articles, Brief Communications, or Reviews).
- What are the strengths of your paper?

Paragraph 3 / 4

The closing

- Assure the editors of the following:
 - You wrote the manuscript
 - No part of it has been published previously
 - There are no conflicts of interest

Pre-fabricated, mandatory sentences

- *We confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal.*
- *All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to [insert the name of the target journal].*

Overview of miscellaneous tips

Don't downplay your work; get excited

- PATHOS!

Read ALL of the instructions/directions

- Most frequent reason SS lose points, grants are rejected, jobs aren't offered, etc.

Be succinct and simplify

- Vary sentence length
- Eliminate prepositional phrases

Focus on content

- Only relevant information included

We don't waste the reader's time

- “Time is money”

The writer must be 100% clear (Reid, 2018)

- No assumptions about what the writer knows
- All W's (and H) must be included
- A paper/document in English is a “self-contained universe”

Watch and take notes

- <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/news/seminar-on-academic-writing/>
- Starting at 37:50- 51:47

Discuss two takeaways

- From your notes, choose two important takeaways
- Discuss with a person next to you

Responses from experts

Two women, two men

One junior scholar, one recent retiree, two in the middle

Various fields

KHO– Directs program, Full
Professor, many
publications/books



KHO says:

- For cover letters--in my field, they tend to be very short and sweet. Mine are usually just a few sentences:
- I'm sure some people write longer ones, but in my experience editors are exceptionally busy, so the more to-the-point, the better.

Dear [Editor's Name]:

Here is my [x] word manuscript, entitled [y]. In it, I rely on [xxx] to argue [yyy] [Basically one sentence that includes methodology and very brief summary]. I hope you'll find this piece to be a good fit with [journal title]'s focus on [xx] (or mission to bridge [yy] with [zz]). Please let me know if you need anything further.

Sincerely,

XX

GG--Full Professor,
former Writing Program Director,
three pages of publications, three
textbooks for students



GG says:

- I took a grad class one time where the project was to read a year's worth of a journal that each student wanted to submit to (*College English*, *CCC*, *Rhetoric Review*, etc.) and make a list of who was publishing there (literature review) along with what the subjects were--what was the general focus of each journal? As our final project we had to submit an essay to the journal.

- It was kind of tedious work but also a lot of fun finding out what journals were talking about -- that gave us real insight into the journals.
- Then when we discussed what had been published, we could work to play one off of others "(While R suggested that students spend too much time finding rather than evaluating source material, Evans argued that students could do both if they learned how to . . .".
- Or, "While K proposed that international students spend more time learning vocabulary, B posited that language labs were a 'thing of the past' and provided evidence that social interplay improved their language use . . .").
- Or something like, "Over the last twelve months, (name of journal) focused primary on _____ and _____, and those essays serve as solid grounding for my own concept of _____, where I'll argue that _____"

- All of this reminded me of what an author once wrote, someone who wanted to write for *Ladies Home Journal* or some magazine like that.
- She said she read every issue for a year, including the ads. She said, as I recall, that "it was nauseous" . . . but at the end of the year she knew what the journal would publish and she started selling articles to it.

- Anyway, I guess my advice is to *really know* the journal, so your cover letter can refer to this article or that focus, and then explain why your submission is new or adds to the field. It's kind of like selling a book:

publishers want to know what else is out there, why your idea is different/better, and why it should be published now (rather than last year or next year)

- To me, that's what makes an effective letter: **some info on what's been published (so the editor can see you know what he or she has been working with), along with why and how your idea adds to the field.**



- Remember one of the things I'd ask students when they'd make some claim or another--"who cares?"
- Kind of smarmy, but editors need to know why their readers might care, might want to read what your letter is proposing; hopefully your submission letter will make the editor think gee, that sounds interesting; **I'd like to read what this person sent me!**

MWA—Professor of Curriculum
and Instruction, editor and
reviewer



MWA says

- I'm on the editorial board(s) of a wide range of journals and there are often significant differences in the approaches.
- The most important thing that binds them together is **the ability of the person submitting an article to connect the submission to an important conceptual, political, or empirical problem in the field.**
- This seems too obvious to say, but it is important. Doing this raises the attention level of often very over-burdened editorial staff. who must make initial decisions about a large number of manuscripts.

SS—Assistant Professor, editor of
major journal

Interviewed over the phone



SS says

- “As an editor, I don’t think cover letters are as important. I look at the paper”
- Aim and Scope of journal need to align with study
 - initially rejected because outside the “scope”
 - Author reviewed/reframed lit review to align more with a “critical ESP approach”
- People are still disciplinarily oriented. It fits or it doesn’t.

- Cover letters are formulaic
- **“Sometimes I don’t even look at the cover letter”**
- **“Some journals don’t even require a cover letter”**

Two most common reasons for **rejection**

1. Connections not made to journal's aim and scope
 - Coherence/relevance
 - Making connections
2. METHOD(S) section is problematic
 - Sample size
 - Analysis not set up correctly
 - Questions about data
 - Comparing data sets in a way that doesn't make sense

***She said this doesn't relate to language ability, it's related to research design

If “revise and resubmit,” ...

- Responding to the **reviewer’s comments is the biggest challenge**
 - Overwhelming
 - Emotional

- Respond to everything
- Substantial changes, address comments
- With each issue, address comment



Drafting a cover letter

Part 3

Let's draft

1. Try to find a journal in your field (7 minutes)

- Google search this journal
- Identify the aim and scope
- Write down any other important information about the culture of the paper

Discuss with neighbor

3 minutes

Introductory
Material

Salutation

- Use the current editor's name – and spell it correctly.
- Follow guidelines for a business letter

2. Practice writing your salutation

Paragraph 1 /2

Context

- Name of manuscript
- Type of manuscript (e.g., research article, review, case study, etc.)
- Rationale of study and major findings
- Name(s) of author(s)

3. Practice introductory paragraph(s)

- Use bullets to draft content
- OR
- Draft full sentences

Paragraph 2 /3

The “fit”

- Explain why your work is a good fit for this particular journal
- Tailor your message to this group
- Demonstrate that you understand the values/priorities of this journal

- Why would your paper be of interest to the readers of that journal?
- Explain which section of the target journal would be most appropriate for your manuscript (e.g., Original Articles, Brief Communications, or Reviews).
- What are the strengths of your paper?

4. Practice your “fit” section

- Review the aims and scope + include!
- Address these items, to show how the paper fits

Paragraph 3 /4

The closing

- Assure the editors of the following:
 - You wrote the manuscript
 - No part of it has been published previously
 - There are no conflicts of interest

5. Draft your closing section

Pre-fabricated, mandatory sentences

- *We confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal.*
- *All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to [insert the name of the target journal].*

6. Don't forget the mandatory sentences

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