

The making of a *Nature* cover: Our guiding principles for cover artwork

Nature-branded journals use a specific set of guidelines and principles in the selection and creation of cover artwork. This guide is for authors submitting artwork for consideration for the cover of the journal *Nature* as well as the Nature-branded family of research journals. We encourage you to get creative and submit artwork to accompany your manuscript—and if you follow this guide, you might just end up on the cover!

Here we will explain:

[Benefits of submitting cover artwork](#)

[How artwork is selected](#)

[Types of cover artwork](#)

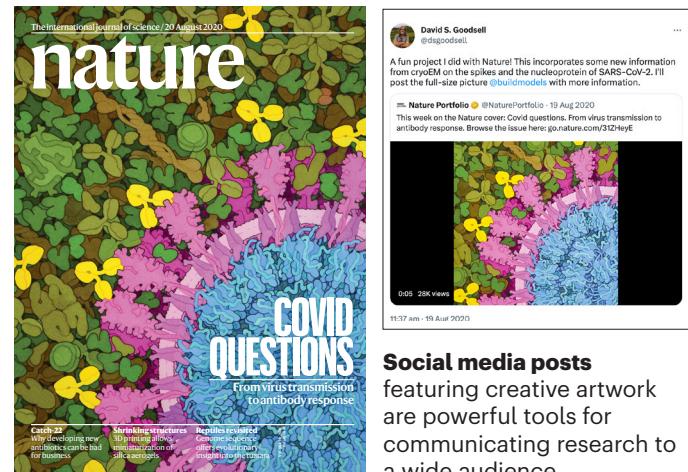
[What we look for in a cover, and things to avoid](#)

As well as: [How to submit your artwork and technical specifications](#)

Benefits of submitting cover artwork

Why should I submit cover artwork? Cover artwork plays a unique role in communicating your research. Striking artwork sparks interest and curiosity in your work, and often engages a wider audience than other scientific visuals like figures in a research paper, which are powerful but tend to communicate more narrowly.

Hopefully your submission lands on the cover, but regardless, your efforts in creating an accessible, beautiful representation of your research is not a wasted effort. These types of images are extremely useful for communicating your research in other ways, such as in press releases, posters, presentations, websites, and social media, where new audiences are ready and waiting.



Social media posts
featuring creative artwork
are powerful tools for
communicating research to
a wide audience.

How artwork is selected

How do we choose? The selection process varies by journal, but generally speaking, once papers are assigned an issue, a shortlist of cover submissions is made for that issue, and those papers compete against each other for the cover.

There is no one path to a cover—once on the shortlist, artwork can be selected because of the topic of the research, or the superior quality of the artwork. In any case, the best way to increase your chances is to follow this guide, submit your best work and make the shortlist.

For *Nature* the flagship journal only: As a weekly multidisciplinary journal, *Nature* aims to feature a variety of scientific disciplines from week to week. In addition, the cover story should be freshly published, so there should not be a gap of more than a few weeks from the date of online publication to when it appears in print. Papers taking our accelerated publishing route (AAP) are generally not eligible for the cover for this reason, so if you prioritize a chance at a cover over publication speed, please mention this to your manuscript editor.

Types of cover artwork

There is no ‘best’ artistic media for covers. Quality artwork can come from classic techniques like painting and drawing to electronic forms like 3D rendering, microscopy or digital photography.

Common types of journal cover artwork:

- Photography
- Illustration (2D and 3D)
- Imaging
- Computer modelling
- Artist conception



Photography communicates instantly and effortlessly. It automatically implies a degree of specificity, most frequently used to showcase specific entities (place, event, species, etc.).

Illustration is effective for representing concepts and metaphors. It can be 2D (left, created in Adobe Illustrator) or 3D (right, created in modelling software), abstract or specific.



Imaging takes many forms, from microscopy to astro photography, showing us things unperceivable to the un-aided human eye.

Artist conceptions are illustrations that use data and evidence to artistically reconstruct something.

What we seek, and things to avoid

What we look for in a cover. The best journal covers are a perfect blend of art and science. They tell a story that represents the research accurately, beautifully and creatively, without misleading elements.

Covers are not like figures in your paper—they do not bear the burden of telling the entire story of your research. Rather, they tempt the viewer to learn more. They can be very specific or abstract, as long as they have some of the following qualities.

We seek artwork with:

- Beauty (composition, proportion, balance)
- Technical quality (resolution, clarity)
- Simplicity
- Novelty
- Action



Beauty comes in many forms, but tends to have a standard recipe: good composition (arrangement of elements within a given boundary), proportion, and effective use of colour. Colour should complement composition. It can be used to create hierarchy, highlighting important elements, to create categories of information, or simply for tone.

Composition should also consider other elements present on the page such as the journal logo and other text. For example, the original composition (above, left) had to be reworked to accommodate the journal title at the top, ensuring important image detail was not obscured.



The importance of simplicity cannot be overstated. A cluttered, crowded cover gives the unpleasant sense of information overload. Try to pare back to the essential elements, and avoid the temptation to throw everything in. Remember, cover art only needs to tempt, it does not have to tell the whole story.

Resolution and clarity are absolutely essential, and must be addressed at the very beginning stages of creating imagery. From digital photography to microscopy, please make your originals as high resolution as possible.

Novelty, seeing something that has never been seen before, or in a totally new way, makes cover artwork particularly memorable.

What we seek, and things to avoid

Things to avoid. Not all publishers of scientific journals have the same style and standards. What might work for some journals may not be appropriate for the overall style and tone of the Nature-branded group. Here are some of the most common things we see that might disqualify a submission.

Some common mistakes:

- Too crowded and cluttered; no thought for composition
- Low resolution at full size, blurry or pixelated
- Too childish or cartoonish
- Overused clichés, such as question marks or puzzle pieces
- Copyright infringement, such as depicting a character from film or television
- **Images created by Generative AI are not permitted (such as from DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and Midjourney)**

How to submit

Please submit your cover artwork through the manuscript tracking system when uploading the final version of the manuscript files. If you are not ready to submit cover artwork at this stage, please follow up with the editor who handled your manuscript and they can provide further instructions. To ensure there is enough time to consider your cover artwork, however, it should be sent to us as soon as possible after the submission of your final manuscript files, ideally with 2 weeks.

Cover specifications

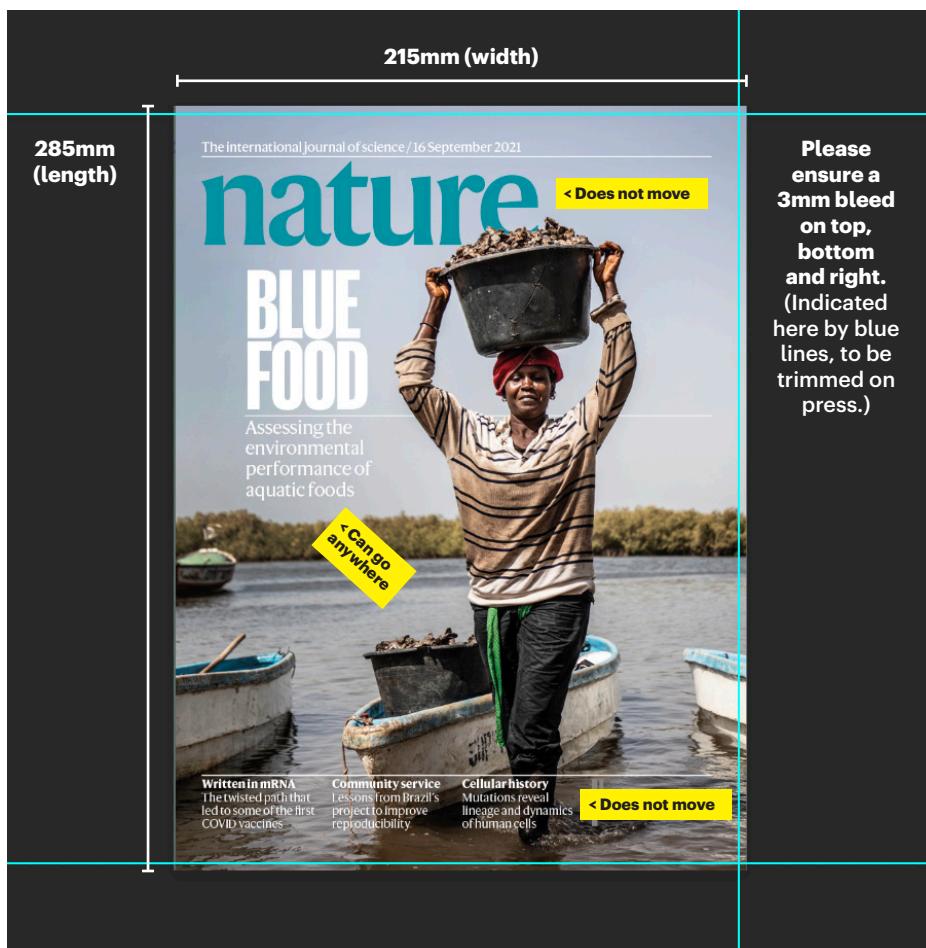
Our covers are 213mm x 285mm. *This includes a 3mm bleed on the top, bottom and right.*

Files should be at least 300 dpi at actual size, in PSD, TIFF, JPEG, or PNG formats. Lower resolution can be submitted through the system initially, but please add a note that higher resolution is available.

Please leave space in your composition for the standard 'page furniture' such as the journal logo at the top and the various coverlines. But please DO NOT include the logos themselves in your artwork.

Coverlines. *Nature* the flagship journal has one main coverline (paired with a smaller secondary line) that can go anywhere, along with three small teasers along the bottom that do not move.

All other Nature-branded research journals have a single coverline that can go anywhere. *Examples can be seen on pages 2–3 of this document.*



On behalf of the art teams at *Nature* and our portfolio of Nature-branded journals, we thank you and look forward to receiving your beautiful cover artwork.