

# How to write a letter of motivation?

There are more kinds of what is generally called 'letter of motivation':

**Cover Letter** (CL) is the document that accompanies your CV when you are applying for a *job* or an *internship*. For *academic purposes*, the document used is typically called **statement of purpose** or simply **letter of motivation**, and is laid out after somewhat different rules.

## 1) When applying for a scholarship or a student placement

A **letter of motivation** (also called a "statement of purpose" or "personal essay") is a brief essay in which you explain what you hope to achieve during your studies or the scholarship program for which you are applying, as well as what it is that **qualifies** you as a top candidate for the scholarship.

The letter of motivation is an extremely important part of the application documents because it provides the selection committee with a description of your personality, as well as in what way you plan to contribute to and benefit from the scholarship program for which you are applying. It will give a "personal touch" to the application. Its purpose is to present you as the best candidate to a commission that will evaluate your application. The essay should present your personal **abilities** and **qualities** that will distinguish you from the other candidates.

Its baseline should emphasize your **goals** and **prospects** about your future career. It should follow up the structure of the CV, and in its first part should be focused on presentation of the candidate, with several short important sentences regarding the candidate's interests and importance of the study programme for his/her future prospective.

Besides academic qualifications required by the University, the letter should express candidate's qualification as a person, such as: out-going personality, self-confidence, communication skills, ability to do several tasks at the same time. **Lists of courses** at the relevant University should be included in the second paragraph.

Your **professional goals** and interests should be included in the third paragraph of the letter. Long term goals and your future contribution as a member of the society are also included here. This part of the letter is essential as it exposes the student's plans as future alumni member of the University.

Every University has a special interest to attract the best students from all around the world, so it is not bad if you can mention your activities after the graduation.

The letter should be short, but not as short as a cover letter for a job application. It is normal to be up to 1.5 pages, written *without any kind of mistakes and using logic and clear language*. Usually it is not signed, but in some cases it looks better if the handwritten signature is included. Check with the organization which you are applying to grant you a scholarship.

The most important is to remember that your motivational letter should mark you as a successful candidate different than the average students. It is extremely important that the letter is written *after reading the study programme and subjects covered* and University's specificity, like sport teams or campus facilities. Be free to forward the semi-final version of the letter to your colleagues, friends and teachers. Their remarks will be very useful. Do not be mad if everyone changes something, with that checking your letter will be better and its mission will be accomplished.

#### **Useful advice**

- make sure you know the exact format of the letter of motivation required by the competition before you start writing (required number of words/pages, spaces, etc.)
- make sure your text is clear and readable and that you made no typos or spelling mistakes. This especially goes for if it is written in a foreign language that you are obliged to master on a high level

### **1) When applying for a job or a work placement/internship**

The CL, submitted when applying for a job, is short (200-250 words), with a quite rigid structure and has the layout of a letter. Its goal is to introduce the CV, to bring to attention aspects of your activity that can help your application and are not listed or not presented in the proper light in the CV.

In short, its goal is to answer the recruiter's question: "Why should I hire this person?".

**Layout.** The layout is that of a formal business letter: your address and contact details come under your name, in the upper right corner of the page. Underneath, aligned left, write the name, function, organisation and address of the person you are writing to. It is a lot better to know the name of the person who is going to read your letter. You should address the letter directly to him or her. In the case you do not know the name, an e-mail, a little digging in the net or a phone call should help you get that name, in case it is not mentioned in the official announcement. Under the receiver's address, but aligned right, write the date of the day when you are writing the letter. You should spell the name of the month and use four digits for the year. You can put in front of the date the location, e.g. Sofia, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000

If you do know the name of the addressee, start with *Dear Mr (Mister), Ms (Miss), Mrs (Mistress), Dr (Doctor)*, without the full stop that you might expect to follow the abbreviation, and the surname of the addressee, followed by comma (Dear Dr Smith,). In this case, you should end the letter with the salutation *Yours sincerely*. If you do not know the name, start with *Dear Sirs*, or *Dear Sir or Madam* and close with *Yours faithfully*. In American business correspondence, *Yours truly* is acceptable in both cases. Do not start the body of the mail with a capital letter, since it follows a comma.

**Structure.** Ideally, a cover letter has no more than four paragraphs. The goal of the first is to specify what you are applying for and how did you find out about that opportunity. The last one outlines your availability for an interview, suggesting in this way a concrete follow-up for your application.

The second paragraph should list your **skills** and **qualifications** that make you the right person for the position you are applying for. Read carefully the announcement, identify the requirements and see how your skills match those required. Do not simply state you have them, prove it. Ideally, you should start from your experience and show how you have developed those qualifications by doing what you have been doing/learning. Same as in the case of your CV, the result should portrait you as an independent, creative person that can take initiative and deal with responsibilities, apart from the specific skills needed for the job. In short, the second paragraph should show why you are good for the job.

The third should point out why you want it. You should outline your **interest** for the skills you are going to learn if you get the job. The impression left should be that you can make a genuine contribution to the company's operations, while simultaneously deriving satisfaction from your work.

After the fourth paragraph leave a blank space, same as you should do in the beginning, after the salutation (Dear). Write the proper **closing**, as described above and your name. Do not forget to leave a blank space between the closing and your name and to sign the letter in that space.

**Enclosure.** It is customary for formal letters to mention whether you have enclosed any documents accompanying the letter. Simply mention enclosure or write 'curriculum vitae' under the heading enclosure at the end of the letter.

Print the letter on A4 white paper same as that on which your CV was printed, and put both documents in an A4 envelope of matching colour. If you are mailing it, request a notification that your documents have been received. Wait at least two weeks since the day you sent your application or after the deadline before writing again in the case you did not get any answer.

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