

Writing Letters for Academic Purposes

Motivation Letter

1- What is a Motivation Letter?

A motivation letter is a document detailing your professional skills and reasons for applying for a course of study, a scholarship or volunteer job. This letter accompanies your application and supporting documents, such as a transcript of your grades or a resume. A motivation letter is sometimes called a "statement of purpose" or a "motivational letter".

Motivation letters are not commonly used for paid job applications, which are typically accompanied by cover letters. Generally, motivation letters are required for post-graduation scholarships. However, it may be required sometimes while applying for an undergraduate program.

2- Why is a cover letter important?

The objective of a motivation letter is to explain to the authorities why should you be chosen for the degree program and what plans do you have for the education you will receive. In other words, the letter of motivation speaks out some of the important aspects of your research proposal that connects it up with your academic competence and personality.

To contract the list of candidates, selection panels frequently use motivation letters. Then the candidates considered best are finally selected for the program. The motivation letter is the most significant part of your application. The success of your application mainly counts on the motivation letter.

3- Take the following into consideration when writing a motivation letter

Following these tips can help make your motivation letters stand out and convince decision-makers to consider your application further.

- **Follow any guidelines.** Follow any formatting, length and content guidelines provided by your prospective school or non-profit organization. If the organization does not provide any details, write approximately 1/2 to one page of text with a basic 12-point font, such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- **Write with personality.** Your interests, feelings and perspectives are unique, so writing about them is a good way to separate your letter from others. Write in a natural voice that reflects how you would speak to your recipient if they were in a room with you. Include interesting details that help your motivation letter stand out from others. Humor can be misinterpreted, so opt for a more serious tone.
- **Use accessible language.** Accessible language that readers can easily understand is best for motivation letters. Identify any unnecessarily complex terms or jargon when you are

proofreading and replace them with simpler words. Write short, active sentences that cannot be misinterpreted.

- **Focus on your strengths.** Write about your personal strengths, rather than your challenges or limitations. Writing about your strengths helps the recipients of your motivation letters understand your value to their organization and keeps your letter's tone positive.

4- How to write a motivation letter

Generally speaking, there are two ways to write your motivation letter in terms of organization:

- Classical Way of Writing a Motivation Letter:

Classical way guides writing a letter of motivation in three parts; introduction, body, and conclusion. Using the classical way is not a bad idea. You can use it if you want to write the body of the letter as a story. Hence, not breaking the reading flow. No matter what method you chose, the letter basically contains an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

- Modern Way of Writing a Motivation Letter:

While another way of composing a letter of motivation is to use 5-7 paragraphs, where the body is divided into 3-4 paragraphs. It completely depends on your choice. However, dividing the body into more paragraphs is considered beneficial, as each paragraph highlights a completely different point.

In all cases, writing a good motivation letter takes time, so make sure you methodically work through the steps to make yours the best possible. Allowing plenty of time to write your motivation letter ensures you include all the necessary content and follow each important step, including the following:

1. Write an outline

Write a point-form outline noting the content of your motivation letter and its order. Write points covering the following topics:

- Why you want to study the course or volunteer with the program
- Your skills or qualities that will benefit the school or non-profit
- Why you are interested in the school or non-profit organization

Think critically about whether you are including all relevant details. A motivation letter for a Ph.D. program will need more details about your experiences and specific future plans than a motivation letter for a bachelor's program, for example. Cross-reference your outline with information from the school or non-profit organization to show you have the qualities and qualifications they are looking for. Assess your format and structure and determine whether moving points around would create a more logical flow.

Revise your outline until you are satisfied with it. You can reference your completed outline when writing your polished motivation letter to stay on track.

2. Write an introduction

Write an introduction that introduces yourself to the recipient. Address your recipient by name, if possible, to give your motivation letter a personal touch. Your introduction should capture your recipient's attention and encourage them to read on, so include details about your achievements in this section.

3. Expand your outline for your body

Expand the points in your outline to form your motivation letter's body. Take a new paragraph for every new topic. Remember, your motivation letter aims to convince your recipient of your value, so use compelling facts to be persuasive.

4. Conclude your motivation letter

Write a conclusion to your motivation letter that summarizes your goal and leaves a positive final impression. You should also thank your recipient for considering your application and encourage them to contact you if they have any questions.

5. Proofread your motivation letter

Proofread your motivation letter to make it more concise and professional. Correct any spelling and grammatical errors and awkward phrasing. Edit information already listed in your application form or resume to ensure your motivation letter contains only unique information.

You may need to proofread your motivation letter several times to identify all problem areas. If time permits, complete this step two days or more after writing your motivation letter as time away from your work allows you to view it more objectively. To help ensure your letter has professional grammar and spelling, ask a trusted friend or colleague to proofread your motivation letter after you.

5- Motivation Letter Format Guidelines

Formatting includes factors such as page margins, font type and size, line, paragraph and section spacing, and document type. For example, a letter without the correct spacing between paragraphs, or with too much text on a page, is going to look cluttered, or a letter saved as a file type that is not meant for a text document (such as a .jpg or a .png) may prevent the reader from opening and viewing it.

A motivation letter that is saved correctly and uses sufficient white space, a simple, reasonably sized font, and an appropriate salutation and closing will make a positive impression. Use the correct spacing: 1 or 1.5.

- Don't be tempted to use justification. Left side align is easy on the eye.
- There should be one - inch margins for some white space and friendly impression.
- When it comes to the paragraph, there should be double spacing between them.
- Fonts like Calibri, Arial and Times New Roman are welcome.

6- What is the difference between a motivation and a cover letter?

The **motivation letter** is usually used when applying for something e.g. for acceptance to a university, to a student programme, to a non-profit organization for voluntary work etc. The **cover letter, in contrast**, is used when you apply for a job. You send both a letter and your detailed CV.

In the cover letter, you must state clearly the position you are applying for and explain why your profile matches the position. To put it simply, it must answer the question “Why you?”

Usually, people mix up a letter of motivation and a cover letter. It’s obvious because the main purpose of both is to persuade a person who is going to read the letter that you’re the most suitable candidate for a given position. But remember, a cover letter frames you more for the job position, whereas a motivation letter highlights your motives for applying to a certain scholarship or an educational program.

A Sample Scholarship Motivation Letter

Owlie McScholar
9876 Smith St.
Stillwater, OK 74074

The Scholarship Committee
123 Learning Rd. Suite 4A
Oklahoma City, OK 73127

Dear Scholarship committee,

My name is Owlie McScholar and I am a third year student at Oklahoma State University. I am currently pursuing a five-year Bachelor of Architecture Degree, and I plan to follow up with a one-year master's degree after I graduate.

While in high school, I worked extensively with my local Habitat for Humanity branch to help build homes for low income families. I learned about the construction process from the ground up, and I discovered the importance of function in architectural design. The homes we built during my four years as a volunteer were never extravagant, but they served their purpose and became a beacon of hope for their owners.

My education is largely focused on this mindset: function over form, stability over showmanship. I have enrolled in several classes that crossover to the Architectural Engineering major because I want to have a comprehensive view of how design meets structure. I have worked on three extra-credit residential design projects under the supervision of my architecture professors (Dr. X and Dr. Y) to accelerate my research and education.

I wanted to become an architect to create accessible, affordable housing opportunities in underprivileged communities. Living in a college town, I have seen countless rental properties available, but there are few homes for sale that are priced affordably enough for college students and first-time buyers. This is the case in many towns throughout America, especially areas with a low standard of living. My goal is to build neighborhoods of sufficient starter homes that can help adults build equity, avoid excessive debt, and create financial stability for their futures.

I have an internship scheduled with LMNOP Architectural Firm in the summer, and I will continue my on-the-job training there after my master's degree. After working under acclaimed residential architects Suzan Craft and Peter Wood, I would like to open my own architectural firm focused on developing inexpensive, high-quality housing. Also, I would like to work with Habitat for Humanity again, this time as an architect instead of a general laborer. I believe firmly in their mission to build "a world where everyone has a decent place to live."

I appreciate your consideration. With your assistance, I can continue my schooling in architecture and design to bring accessible homes to those in need.

Sincerely,
Owlie McScholar
Signature

Dear Sir or Madam:

With this letter, I would like to express my interest in studying at the University of XY as an Erasmus student.

I am currently studying Master's Degree programme in Regional Geography at the ABC University in London. Having looked through the materials of the Foreign Department of my university, I was very delighted to find the opportunity to spend one semester learning geography at the University of XY. I have decided to apply for this programme because I am sure it would strongly enrich my future studies and help me in my prospective career. Moreover I consider this programme as a great opportunity to get in touch with British culture and educational system. Last but not least, I am very curious about different approaches to the geography at the foreign university.

I have chosen to apply for University of XY, because I really like its module system of study. I specially appreciate the wide range of offered modules and the freedom in making your study plan. Many of the modules offered are unique for me, because there is no equivalent at my home university. Very important for me is also an "Excellent" rating for teaching of the Geography department and the overall friendly atmosphere at both the university as well as the city. The third main reason why I have chosen XY is its Urban and Regional Policy Research Institute. It specializes in interdisciplinary research on key regional and urban policy issues, which is the field of geography very familiar to me.

During my prior studies I have found out, that I would like to specialize in Urban and Transport Geography. The University of XY gives me a chance to get in touch with these subjects through modules from both Department of Geography and Department of Town and Regional Planning. In my last year at the ABC University I worked on an empirical study with main focus on transportation costs of suburbanisation and urban sprawl. I really liked my project and I am keen to continue in it. I would like to use my stay in XY for further developing my skills in empirical research and starting working on my diploma project. The possibilities that gives me University of XY further expand those at my home university. I would take modules focusing on Transport and Urban geography and European Studies.

I would very much like to spend one semester at the University of XY. This would give me a chance to deepen my geographical knowledge in the inspiring, creative, and cosmopolite environment of one of the largest British universities. Furthermore I could improve my English and increase my confidence in passing the TOEFL examinations after I return. Moreover, I am confident that my experience in London would be extremely exciting, fun, and valuable for both my studies and overall general development.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours faithfully,
Suzan Parent