

How to Write a Letter of Motivation

When applying for a graduate programme leading to Master's or PhD degree, applicants are requested to submit a letter of motivation. These letters of motivation play an important role in the selection process. Regrettably, however, they often fail to convince any member of a selection committee.

How do you write a successful letter of motivation?

1. Take your time and start early. The letter of motivation is a crucial document in your application. Never try to write it down in one evening.
2. Do not start your letter of motivation by repeating your CV.
3. The letter of motivation should answer the following questions:
 - a. What is your professional goal? In which sector would you like to work after obtaining your degree?
 - b. In which way do you intend to contribute to the social, political or technical development of your home country once you are in a respective position? (You may refer to knowledge from books and newspapers as well as to your professional or personal experience. Some facts and figures are highly welcome.)
 - c. Why do you apply for the chosen programme? Which of the courses offered in this programme are particularly beneficial in pursuing your professional goals? (Make sure you are well informed!)
 - d. Why do you think you are the right person for this programme?
 - What knowledge and skills gathered in your previous education will be useful?
 - Have you already gathered any relevant professional experience?
 - Have you gathered any relevant experience as a member of any organization? (Students association, NGO, political party, volunteer service ... If so, submit proof of your membership / your social involvement.)
 - How do you estimate your own personality? Do you think you are a good leader? Are you somebody who can make a difference? What makes you think so? (Emphasize your strong points, but be realistic.)
4. Make sure your letter of motivation is well composed. First reflect on all the above questions, take notes, read more, discuss with friends. Then write an outline. Then write the text. (Not all of the above questions have to be addressed!) Do not include the outline or the questions in your text.
5. Apply an appropriate style of writing:
 - Avoid all kind of platitudes, flowery phrases and flattery.
 - Deal with your topics in a reflective and factual way. Do not campaign for your beliefs.
6. Proofread the text and delete all dispensable and redundant parts. At the end, your letter of motivation should comprise not more than one page. Pay attention to grammar and spelling!