

Guide: Motivation Letter

To help you write your motivation letter, we made an elaborate guide which you can use during this process. Furthermore, here you can find tips on the layout/style and content of the document. We wish you all the best of luck in writing your letter! We also offer checks on your letter. [Find out how to get your letter checked here.](#)



wur.eu/studentcareerservices

Preparation

1. Analyse the vacancy and organisation

Start by analysing the vacancy and job description. What is stated in the vacancy? What kind of person is the organisation looking for? Also, what is the company culture (formal or more informal)? Try to get a clear picture of the vacancy and the organisation. If anything is unclear to you, you can decide to call the organisation (often there is a contact person listed in the vacancy). Make sure you have a clear question for this person.

A good letter is written in a style that seamlessly matches the organisation's communication style. You can check this by looking at their website. This will help you to decide whether to adopt a formal, informal, business-like, or creative style.

2. Match yourself with the vacancy

Your motivation letter should be tailored to the intended readers. To make sure that the employer thinks you are suitable for the job, your letter needs to focus on the match between your skills/experiences and the employer's requirements that are stated in the vacancy. It can help to write the requirements down and to look at which qualities you possess. Make sure you can substantiate how you got these qualities. For this, take a close look at your CV.

How to write a motivation letter

1. The start of your letter

After you analysed the vacancy and organisation, and made it clear to yourself how you match with the vacancy, you can start with writing your motivation letter. First, write down the (contact) details of the organisation, the place and date at which you sent the letter to the organisation, the subject of the letter and a fitting salutation.

Example:

Name organisation

Name department (optional)

Name contact person

Location, date

Subject: Motivation letter for <vacancy title>

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Prof. <last name>,

Tip! If possible, try to find the name of the contact person for the salutation, so that your letters gets a more personal touch.

2. The first sentence

Open creatively! Grab the reader's attention right at the very start of your letter. Incorporate current affairs, ambitions, facts or best of all, a (short) personal anecdote. Prospective employers often must work their way through an enormous number of motivation letters, so the first sentence is more important than you may think. This sentence must catch the reader's attention. Dare to depart from safe and standard opening sentences such as "My name is Jane and I would like to apply for the position of research intern". Instead, begin with a powerful one-liner that encapsulates your specialisation or your ambitions.

Examples for inspiration:

- "Some say a dream job does not exist, but I just found its vacancy."
- "Your product is the one I always promote to my friends."

3. The first paragraph

The first sentence is part of an introductory paragraph in which you state which position you're applying for and motivate why you are interested in this position and/or organisation.

After the catchy opening sentence (or short anecdote), describe that you want to apply for the position at the organisation; mention the title of the vacancy/position and mention the name of the organisation.

Example for inspiration:

"By means of this letter, I would like to apply for the position as Area Crop Manager at Seed Valley."

Then, continue with your motivation. What makes them an interesting organisation for you? Why is the position interesting? Why are you applying? Show that you have done your homework and know the organisation and its field of work; study their website, vision, mission, ambition, etc.

Example for inspiration:

"This internship at MSD caught my immediate attention. In the news I saw that your company is sharing the patent of the COVID 19 pill with other countries, which otherwise would be unavailable to them. This matches perfectly with my personal ambition, which is to make the world a healthier place."

Tip! Be careful not to just describe why you like the position or why the position is such a great career opportunity for YOU. Instead, try to write your motivation towards the organisation, focus on what you can contribute and have to offer.

4. The second paragraph

Obviously, you need to explain why you are interested in the position, but the focus of your letter should be on what you have to offer. Therefore, in your second paragraph, you match the criteria asked for in the vacancy to your own skills and experiences. Explain why you are suitable for the position and capable to do the tasks that are part of the job. Point out how your capabilities meet the requirements asked for in the vacancy. Make sure to use the same words the organisation uses in the vacancy. Next, it is important to mention examples to substantiate your capabilities. For instance: do not only state that you can work under pressure but give an example of why you are able do this. You can describe these examples by using the STAR method (describe situation, tasks, your actions, results). Mention at least one elaborate example in your letter. Furthermore, keep in mind to sell yourself: combine experience from your CV with personal attributes and give examples of what you did in a story telling way. Lastly, focus on your achievements and how you would use your qualities in the job.

Example for inspiration (STAR method):

"In my function as chairman during my board year at the student council, I strongly developed my presentation skills. During that time, I gave presentations weekly, which makes me feel confident now to speak in front of hundreds of people. Therefore, I am assured that the position as spokesperson at Limagrain would suit me very well."

Tips!

- The first criteria in the vacancy requirements are often most important!
- What if you don't meet all (key) requirements? Explain you don't have the skill yet, but are currently learning that skill, have other skills that compensate for that, etc. Make sure to approach it from a positive point of view!
- For an **internship position**, mention also what you want to learn.
- For a **PhD position**, it is important to explain your knowledge and passion about the research topic.
- With an **open letter**, be very specific about what function and what tasks you would like to do at the organisation, have a detailed look at their website to match what you would like to do with their possibilities. Consider to give them a call first if they are open to receive open letters. In your letter, refer to this call.
- Sometimes, large organisations use software to scan your motivation letter for words/topics. So, use the same words as they use in their vacancy's criteria.
- Mention no new experiences (compared to the CV).

5. The third paragraph

The third paragraph is the concluding paragraph in which you close your letter. Summarize why you are the best candidate for this job and say that you would like to meet the recipient of the letter. So, end with a call to action by stating that you want to motivate your letter in a personal contact and that you hope to hear from them.

Example for inspiration:

"In conclusion, next to my passion for potatoes, I am convinced that my communication and analytical skills make me a very suitable candidate for this job. It would be a privilege to be working towards a sustainable future together with McCain Foods. Thank you in advance for considering my application and I would be happy to further clarify my motivation in a personal conversation."

6. End of the motivation letter

Close the motivation letter with a suitable greeting and your name.

Example:

*Best regards,
John Doe*

*E: johndoe@hotmail.com
T: 06 12345678*

7. Attachments

Lastly, you can state that your CV is attached to the letter (some organisations also ask for a letter of recommendation, if so, you can state that that is included in the attachment as well). If you choose for this, include the CV in the same document as the motivation letter. Be aware on the following: if you send your letter via email, you can leave this last sentence out of your motivation letter. This, as you must explain in the email message itself which documents the organisation can find in the attachment of the email. If you apply for a position via a portal, you may not need to include this sentence either as often there is a specific button for the CV (and/or any other documents).

Tips for the layout and style of your motivation letter

- **Maximum length:** Make sure your letter is max. 1 page (though a motivation letter for a PhD position might need more pages than 1). Try to keep it short, otherwise the reader might lose their attention.
- **Layout:** Make sure your layout is clean and has a logical structure. Consider to match the style of your letter with your CV. For example, use the same font.
- **Font:** Use an easy to read font such as Arial, Verdana, etc.
- **Alignment:** Align your letter to the left side.
- **Margins:** Don't use very narrow page margins.
- **Paragraph style:** Write your letter with paragraphs, do not use bullet lists, tables, etc.
- **Format and document title:** Always send your motivation letter (and CV) in PDF format when you apply for a position. Include your name in the title of the letter, CV and email.

Tips for the content of your motivation letter

- **Tailoring:** Tailor your motivation letter (and CV) to every position. Always write a new letter for each application. It is fine to re-use parts that work well, but always tailor it to the job. This as you need to adapt your letter to the vacancy: no two letters you write should be the same as no vacancy is the same.
- **Active language:** Use active language instead of passive language in your letter. For example, state: my passion is finance, rather than finance is my passion. This will make sure your letter is easier to read.
- **Positive writing:** Try to write your letter from a positive point of view and avoid negative sentences or sentences including denial. This way, your letter will give organisations the feeling that they are dealing with a strong and capable candidate.
- **Job specific terms:** Avoid abbreviations and/or language that is job specific.
- **'I':** Do not use the word 'I' too much in your letter and do not start a sentence with 'I' too often. Also, never start a new paragraph with the word 'I'.
- **Spelling/Grammar mistakes:** Make sure there are no spelling or grammar mistakes! Maybe obvious, but keep in mind: everything you write in your letter should be readable and interesting.
- **Mention name of the organisation:** You need to state the name of the organisation at least once in your letter, otherwise they might think it is a general letter for all kind of organisations.
- **Make your words count:** Make sure every word/sentence you write has value. Avoid a tedious/lengthy letter.
- **Enthusiasm, clarity, originality:** Be enthusiastic about why you want to work for the organisation. Be clear about what you want; do not be vague. Try not to be too flattering. Avoid cliché terms such as: "enthusiastic", "team player" and "go-getter".
- **No recap of the CV:** Keep in mind that your motivation letter is not a recap of your CV. Instead, refer to your CV. Your CV has already demonstrated that you have the right skills and knowledge, so use the motivation letter to show that you have the right motivation, vision, and personality for the organisation.
- **Personal information:** This appears on your CV. It is not needed to include this in your motivation letter.

Other tips for your motivation letter

- Your letter is more likely to be noticed if you refer to a person who is familiar with or to the organisation. If you have a question about the vacancy, call the prospective employer and refer to this phone call in your letter. However, only do so if you have a relevant question about the position. Otherwise, it may frustrate the employer.
- When you apply for a job, most employers will read your CV first. If your CV interests them, they will go on to read your motivation letter. Your letter is a supplement to your CV, and in it you can explain more about who you are and what your motivations are. Everything that is in your letter, should also be in your CV. No new information, just some extra explanation. It should not be a repeat of your CV in narrative form, but a well-written text in which you introduce yourself to your potential new employer.
- Check, check, double check! It is always good to let someone else check your motivation letter. Ask them to look at the vacancy as well and ask them whether they think there is a good match between the vacancy and your motivation letter.