

## Cover letter / Letter of motivation

The cover is designed to give reviewers of your application a sense of your level of commitment to and knowledge of the programme to which you are applying. Cover letters that have been favourably reviewed demonstrate that the student has a thorough understanding of the programme and environment and has reflected deeply on the personal and intellectual journey he/she hope to undertake while abroad.

**Be as specific as possible.** What, in particular, attracted you to the programme? What particular courses do you hope to take while abroad and why? How do they relate to the courses you have already taken at your home university? How do you imagine the experiences in the programme will relate to your academic, professional and personal goals? In what ways do you anticipate growing, both academically and personally, from your experiences in that programme?

**Use concrete examples.** Remember, when you interview for a job, you would not say that you should be hired simply because you need a job. Rather, you prepare by researching the company to learn as much as you can about it to sell yourself as the perfect candidate for the position at that company. Approach the study statement in the same way. Link your experiences with key aspects of the programme you are applying to: change sentences such as “I’ve been a member of the Science Club” with more effective sentences such as “I’ve been an active member of the science club, participating in; this had let me to... etc.”. Research the programme, review its website and brochure, visit the web site of the partner universities and use all this information in your letter.

**Structure your letter in an effective and coherent way.** Start with a strong introduction as engaging and inviting to read as possible – if the intro isn’t powerful, nobody would read the rest. Your introduction should NOT be a summary of the letter. Next, go into depth about your motivations and how your previous academic/professional path, as well as your future goals, can be linked to that particular programme. End with a strong conclusion: like for the intro, don’t summarize your letter. They have just finished reading it! Link back to the intro and throw in a re-emphasis of the main point.

**Make it thoughtful.** Avoid statements like “I really want to go to *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, so that I can travel all over Brazil” – you have to prove that you are an engaged student, not an active traveller!; or like “I’ve always wanted to live in another country to get to know its culture/language” – this is certainly a valid reason, but it is not sufficient to apply for an Erasmus Mundus programme.

**Include personal reasons and interests.** Surprisingly or not, most selection committees do not simply choose the student with the highest grade point average. Instead, most evaluators are equally interested in students' extracurricular activities. Are they involved in the community? What hobbies do they have? Grades are important, but they are only half the story. Therefore, it is to your advantage to participate in extracurricular activities. Join student unions, volunteer, start a business, find a hobby. All these activities will help to make you stand out in the selection process. Also, you should present yourself as a rational, optimistic and motivated person who is willing to learn and improve.

**Write efficiently.** Don't overkill the reader by throwing in dozens of adjectives and adverbs, concentrate on powerful nouns and verbs that do the job better and keep things shorter.

**More is not always better.** Your letter must be typed or word-processed. One page is standard for cover letters. If you keep it too short (e.g. 3 sentences) it will not be considered as a thoughtful statement. At the same time, three pages letters are too long. You want to keep your cover letter relevant to your programme, so it is important to remember that more is not always better.

**And don't forget...** that your letter of motivation will be one among hundreds, so take enough time to write it. You can write the first version, then after a few days write another one, compare them and write the best final version. You can use the Internet to find some examples of motivation letters, read a couple of them and then write something completely different! Make sure not to copy/paste whole sentences from templates available online! You need to stand above your competition; you need to be honest but also interesting in writing so that people who are reading your letter can feel a different vibe in comparison to other applicants. Finally, proofread your letter, let other people read it, and make sure it's good enough and free of errors before you send it off.