



<http://www.thefreeschool.education/motivation-letters.html>

# How to write a successful motivation letter



**The Free School**

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February

2017

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## **Objective**

This booklet aims to offer information that may aid college, employment and scholarship applicants to write a motivation letter that maximizes their chance of success.

## **Caution**

The guidelines in this document are general points that are useful in most instances. In the vast majority of cases, the official guidelines published by the sponsor are unique to a particular opportunity at their institution.

**Applicants should always comply with the guidelines published by the sponsor that relate to the particular opportunity that they are applying for.**

## Simple **general example** of a brief motivation letter



August 15, 2016

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**Dr. Andrea Jalonek**  
Academic Director  
The Free School  
andrea@thefreeschool.education

**Rajveer Patel**  
PhD Candidate  
rajveer@mahatmacollege.edu

Reference: Postdoctoral research scholarship and teaching assistant (Ref: PD 2017)

Dear Dr. Jalonek,

Please find attached a copy of my CV to support my application for the position listed above as advertised on your website dated June 1, 2016. This program is a precise match with my long-term career objective. I aim to tutor at risk students from developing countries.

My Doctoral program at Mahatma College majors in Development Studies and I completed the coursework component with an A grade average in 2015. My dissertation explores micro-finance loans secured by women in Kerala State, India over the past decade. My quantitative research measures the average net rate of return earned by these women.

My outlook and knowledge-base is global and my understanding of India's NGO sector is strong. Between 2005 and 2014, I worked as a program officer for the Red Cross in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. I am committed to using education to support and empower persons from disadvantaged backgrounds in this region and globally.

I welcome you to keep my CV on file indefinitely for this role and any other suitable positions.

Yours sincerely,

**Rajveer Patel** M.S.Sc MTSS

Source: <http://www.thefreeschool.education/scholarships.html>

## Definition

The motivation letter is known by other synonyms such as:

- A motivation essay
- A personal essay
- A personal statement

The motivation letter is a personal statement that you may be required to write yourself and submit as a supporting document when you apply for a scholarship, employment opportunity or admission into an undergraduate or graduate study program. You may be required to submit a motivation letter for other situations such as when you apply for an internship or a fellowship.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2017, NP) defines the word ‘motivation’ as:

“The need or reason for doing something”

Cambridge Dictionary (Online), *Motivation*,

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/motivation>,

The motivation letter provides the reader with a deeper insight into the applicant's character and likely career trajectory beyond the details that can be gauged from other documents supplied by applicants such as:

- Employment references
- Academic referee reports
- Academic transcripts.

The motivation letter provides employers and admissions officers with insight into the reasons why an applicant seeks to gain entry into a competitive position. The discussion you put forward in this document may positively or adversely distinguish your suitability from other applicants.

The official audience of the motivation letter may seek to determine factors such as whether the applicant has the:

- Mindset of an ethical global citizen;
- Maturity to succeed as a student/employee;
- Track-record of a person who is capable of further successes;
- Career objective that aligns with the study program/career role;
- Self-discipline required to work alone without constant supervision;
- Lifestyle of a person who lives a well-rounded, complete and fulfilling existence.

It is likely that most motivation letters submitted for the same position letters look alike to some extent. Most self-reflective applicants who aim to secure a competitive opportunity will draft a motivation letter that argues to the reader that they are:

- Ethical
- Mature
- Successful
- Career-oriented
- Self-disciplined
- Interesting.

In many cases, the motivation letter is a factor that admissions officers and employers use to reject an applicant. Reasons why a motivation letter may be rejected may include:

- Poor spelling and grammar;
- Including discussion that is irrelevant;
- Not addressing the criteria stated in the guidelines;
- Exaggerating or falsifying claims about past successes;
- Plagiarizing motivation letters from open-access sources;
- Not adhering to minimum and maximum word limit impositions;
- Not customizing your style and content to align with the sponsor's mandate;
- Overly focusing on negative issues rather than exploring positives and potential;

- Using a template writing style that is copied-and-pasted for multiple applications;
- Making statements that are offensive insofar as they go beyond the applicant's legitimate right to engage in freedom-of-speech using logic and scholarly arguments.

### **The Free School's Motivation Letter PowerPoint Presentation**

The Free School has authored a 26-page PowerPoint presentation that aims to assist job, college, internship/fellowship and scholarship applicants to write a successful motivation letter. This document is open-access and may be accessible as a PDF file document, online screen reader format or video file at these links:

<http://www.thefreeschool.education/motivation-letters.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTw0tZdypsM>

<http://www.slideshare.net/thefreeschool/writing-a-motivation-letter-for-scholarships-and-college-applications>

# The Free School



## How to write a motivation letter or a motivation statement for college and scholarship applications

**The Free School Library presentation**

**library@thefreeschool.education**

This PowerPoint presentation contains eleven sections in the following order:

- Part 1: Definitions of the motivation letter.
- Part 2: Examples of mandatory discussion criteria.
- Part 3: Examples of application criteria contained in 'real-life' guidelines.
- Part 4: Distinguishing your application.
- Part 5: Customizing your motivation letter.
- Part 6: Researching the sponsor.
- Part 7: Selecting optional discussion topics.
- Part 8: Locating examples of winner essays.
- Part 9: Writing a résumé (*curriculum vitae*).
- Part 10: Spelling and grammar.
- Part 11: Writing a covering letter.

The following page includes three matrixes that job, scholarship and college applicants may use as a checklist prior to submitting their applications. The pages that follow after this checklist offer additional details about each criterion that is listed in these matrixes to assist you to interpret this checklist.

Not all details shown in this checklist are relevant for all job, college and scholarship applications.

**You should always follow the official guidelines set by the sponsor.**



## Scholarship and college application checklist

Criteria	✓	Further details
Eligibility		<p>These criteria are normally communicated via one or more of the following sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Electronic mail</li> <li>● A digital document</li> <li>● A printed document</li> <li>● The sponsor’s website</li> <li>● Video file <i>e.g. c/-YouTube</i></li> </ul> <p>Please check that the source is current. The guidelines may change from year-to-year.</p>
Motivation letter		
Submission mode		
Submission format		
Submission content		
Application deadline		
Supporting documentation		

### Motivation letters: essential details that are normally not stated in the criteria

Suggestion	✓	Further details
Layout and aesthetics		<a href="http://www.thefreeschool.education/motivation-letters.html">http://www.thefreeschool.education/motivation-letters.html</a>
Spelling and grammar		

### Motivation letters: possible inclusions

Suggestion	✓	Further details
Altruistic objective		<p>PowerPoint presentation titled “How to write a motivation letter or a motivation statement for college and scholarship applications”.</p> <p><a href="http://www.thefreeschool.education/scholarships.html">http://www.thefreeschool.education/scholarships.html</a></p>
Distinguish yourself		
History of excellence		
Align with sponsor’s mandate		

## **Scholarship, employment and college application criteria**

### Eligibility

Do you meet all eligibility criteria? You may be wasting your time and resources applying for a job, scholarship or college position if you do not meet all mandatory criteria. Examples of mandatory criteria may include:

- Eligibility for financial aid
- Capacity to pay tuition fees
- Eligibility for a student visa
- Citizenship/local work rights
- Minimum educational qualifications.

### Motivation letter

Are you required to supply a motivation letter? If the answer is 'yes', the guidelines contained in the booklet may be useful.

### Submission mode

Sponsors may offer one or more submission options. Please be sure that you send your application only via one of the transmission modes listed in the official guidelines. Most sponsors require applicants to submit their applications via one of these modes:

- Postal mail\*;
- Electronic mail;
- Facsimile (fax) transmission;
- Upload your digital document/s onto a webpage;
- Lodge your application in person at the sponsor's or agent's office.

\* If you send your application via postal mail, I suggest that you use registered, tracker postal mail. This provides you with a record that you applied in time. It also enables you to track the location of your package so that you can confirm it has been received and locate it if it is delayed.

I usually send a carbon copy of my application to the sponsor's public email address prior to the cut-off date, clearly noting in one sentence that this is a carbon copy ('cc') of my application that has been sent via the nominated correspondence mode within the required timeframe. Postal mail, faxes and file uploads may be misplaced or stolen. A carbon copy email provides you with evidence that you have applied before the cutoff date and have conformed to the mandatory instructions.

### Submission format

You must adhere to mandatory submission formats. Examples of these may include:

- The notarization of all photocopied documents;
- A maximum number of total pages that you may submit;

- A maximum file size (*e.g.* megabytes or gigabytes) for file uploads;
- The use of a single mandatory font (*e.g.* Times New Roman, Arial).

### Application deadline

You should submit your application on or before the final allowed cutoff date.

The cutoff date may be general. For example, the guidelines may state that “applicants must submit their paperwork during December 2017”.

The cutoff date may be specific. For example, the guidelines may state that “applicants must submit their paperwork before 5pm Eastern Standard Time (Australia), 28 December 2017.

In theory, the sponsor may reject any application that is received one minute after the cut-off time and date. For example, some websites that receive digital applications are closed by Information Technology staff one minute after the cut-off date.

It is advisable to be conservative with your time management. For example, if the United States Postal Service advises you that it takes two days for a registered letter to be sent from Los Angeles to Miami, you should aim to send your application by postal mail at least 3 or 4 days prior to the cut-off date. Sometimes mail is delayed for any number of legitimate reasons that are no fault of the postal service such as inclement weather, strikes

and heavy seasonal workloads. In most cases, a sponsor is not obliged to accept late applications even in cases where a third party is the cause.

The worst time to upload a digital application is during the 60 minutes prior to the cutoff time. There may be a large number of applicants who are uploading their application during this time. It is not uncommon for the upload page to freeze or crash repeatedly during this window period.

### Supporting documentation

You must supply copies of all documents and other material stated in the application guidelines. Examples of mandatory content that you must submit may include:

- A covering letter
- A motivation letter
- Letters of recommendation
- A copy of your birth certificate
- A copy of your academic transcript/s
- Copies of licenses and professional certifications
- An up-to-date copy of your *curriculum vitae* (résumé)

## Submission content

You must address all sub-criteria required of each document. The guidelines published by the sponsor may list mandatory content that you must include within each document.

Examples include:

Covering letter: Details of relevant professional experience and technical skills.

Motivation letter: Details about your personal interests and career objective

The next six points are discussed in detail in this Free School presentation:

“How to write a motivation letter or a motivation statement for college and scholarship applications”

<http://www.thefreeschool.education/motivation-letters.html>

This section summarizes the core points from this PowerPoint presentation.

## Layout and aesthetics

In a small number of cases, a motivation letter and an application may be rejected because the layout and aesthetics are untidy. Admissions officers would rarely admit that they rejected an applicant's motivation letter because its presentation was poor. However, some people associate untidy work with poor quality content and a slack work-ethic. It is best to avoid this negative association in all cases where possible.

You should aim to make your page layouts as appealing as possible for those documents where you are required to type text. Some ways in which you can make your typed documents easier to read include:

- Using one font only;
- Using clean, fresh white paper;
- Using 1.5 or double-line spacing;
- Inserting page-breaks at logical places;
- Using a professional office font such as Arial;
- Avoiding overuse of bold, italics and underline font;
- Using short subheadings to separate distinct discussions;
- Not submitting paperwork that is wrinkled, torn or soiled.

**You must always adhere to the requirements stipulated in the official guidelines.**

### Spelling and grammar

Your spelling and grammar should aim to be flawless. You may use online resources such as [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) and Gmail documents spelling checker. You should aim to use the version of written English that is used in the country where the sponsor is located. For example, if you are applying for a fellowship at the University of Toronto, you should use Canadian English in your written correspondences.

You may appoint a friend or family member to proofread your written documents. You are more likely to detect small errors if you have not proofread these documents for at least three days. When you proofread the same document multiple times over a short space of time, you become blind to small errors. You should therefore aim to finish your written letters as early as possible.

### Altruistic objective

It is safer to argue that you are a worthy candidate as you aim to use your role as a worker or graduate in a way that makes the world a better place for others, rather than discussing only the personal benefits that you will obtain from this opportunity.

### Distinguish yourself

You should try to distinguish yourself from others in a simple and subtle way. What is your identity and why are you proud of this identity? Some examples of a simple, positive core message that may wish to communicate include:

- I am a generous philanthropist;
- I have a proven history of community service and volunteering;
- I am a talented visual artist whose work has been displayed in prominent, prestigious public spaces;
- I am a young entrepreneur who shows much promise;
- I have been disadvantaged at all times throughout my life and I have shown that I deserve a chance to be offered a merit award based on equitable considerations.

### History of excellence

In the spirit of the discussion in the subsection above, you may wish to modestly refer to your history of achievements. You may also document this by providing copies of certificates of achievement, recommendation letters and other evidence.

Examples of accomplishments that you may wish to discuss include:

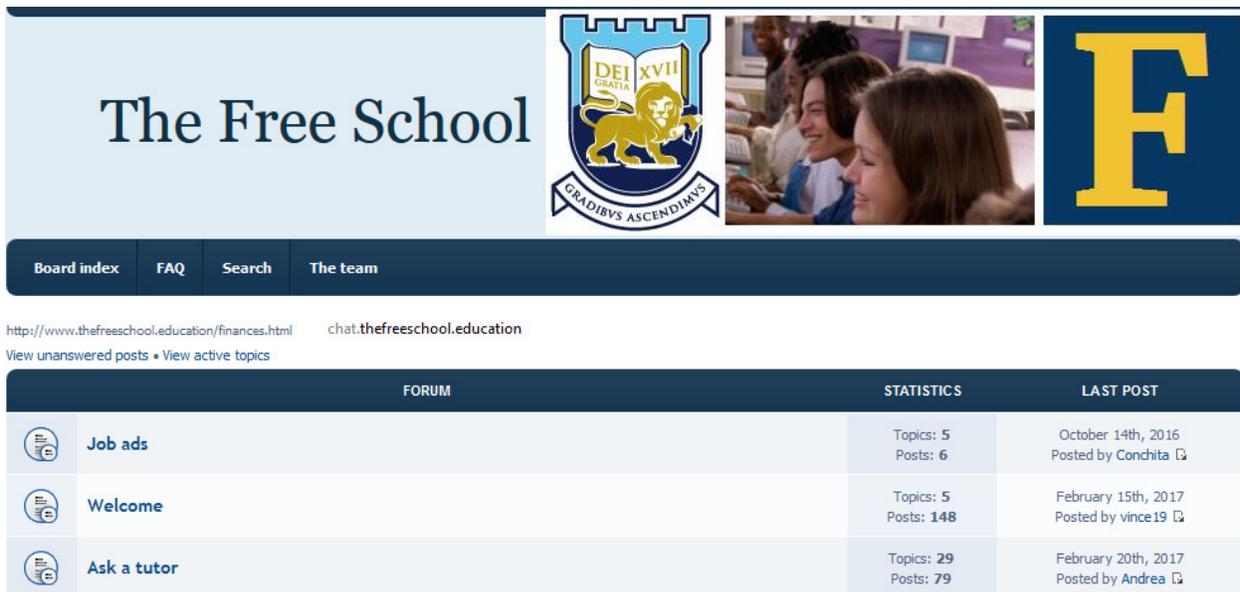
- Winning prizes such as academic essay competitions;
- Membership of a prestigious and successful sporting team;
- Holding a patent or copyright license for an original piece of work;
- Being the holder of a competitive scholarship in the past and/or present;
- Accruing professional work experience that relates to your course of study.

### Align with the sponsor's mandate

It is usually advisable to present your application in a way that is consistent with the ethos and objectives of the individual or institutional sponsor. This is a general principle that is not always enforced by the sponsor. For example, if you apply for a scholarship to study Liberal Arts at a Buddhist Temple College, you may have more chance of success if you explicitly state you support the religious ethos of this college or if you ignore this topic. If your application suggests that your outlook conflicts with the ethos and objective of the sponsor, it might be officially or unofficially rejected on these grounds.

## Questions

You may ask a Free School tutor a question about motivation letters on the School's open-access discussion board.



The screenshot shows the website for The Free School. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text "The Free School" and a logo featuring a lion and the motto "DEI GRATIA XVII GRADIBVS ASCENDIMVS". To the right of the logo is a photograph of students and a large yellow letter "F" on a blue background. Below the navigation bar, there are links for "Board index", "FAQ", "Search", and "The team". The main content area displays a forum table with three columns: "FORUM", "STATISTICS", and "LAST POST".

FORUM	STATISTICS	LAST POST
 <b>Job ads</b>	Topics: 5 Posts: 6	October 14th, 2016 Posted by Conchita ↴
 <b>Welcome</b>	Topics: 5 Posts: <b>148</b>	February 15th, 2017 Posted by vince19 ↴
 <b>Ask a tutor</b>	Topics: <b>29</b> Posts: <b>79</b>	February 20th, 2017 Posted by Andrea ↴

<http://chat.thefreeschool.education/>

Other Free School presentations

# How to apply for a scholarship



**The Free School Library presentation**

**library@thefreeschool.education**

<http://www.thefreeschool.education/scholarships.html>

# The Free School



**PhD free tuition - Graduate Teaching Assistantship / Fellowship programs in the United States, Canada and other countries.**

**Original content analysis research.**

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# The Free School



## How to write a winner essay for college and scholarship applications

**library@thefreeschool.education**

<http://www.thefreeschool.education/scholarships.html>

### **Scholarship Glossary**

The definitions below are general descriptions of the meanings of the word insofar as this word relates to funding post-secondary educational studies. The specific meanings of these words may vary between educational institutions and between countries. You should always check with the scholarships administrator and course adviser at the host educational institution to confirm the definitions of these terms with respect to any agreement that you make with these parties.

**Wishing you every success!**