

## How to write a formal letter

- I. Formal v. informal style
- II. Types of cover letters
- III. Cover letter template
- IV. Short cover letters
- V. Job application/Academic cover letters
- VI. Personal statement
- VII. Grant application/Grant proposal cover letter
- VIII. Statement of proposed activity

### I. Formal v. informal style

There are various types of formal letters, e.g. business letters, letters of application for admission (e.g. to a university), job application letters, grant/scholarship applications. They require a **formal style**, i.e. the right choice of words, sentence structures, and punctuation (see Guidelines for Academic Writing: Typical features of Academic English and Punctuation).

**Compare the two letters below. Decide which of them meets the criteria for a formal business letter and say why** (comment on the format, choose examples of unsuitable words/phrases/structures and match them with words/phrases/structures appropriate for the given purpose).

#### 1.

Hello Mr. Roger Jones,

I got the letter you sent on 1st September, and the stuff about the stock control system you make. It sounds great for us, but I want to check some things before we buy it. You said the system is bang up-to-date, but what happens if you update it again soon? Do we get money off the new one? You said it takes 3 weeks to install the system – that's too long! Can't you do it any quicker? Hope you can reply soon, we're in a bit of a hurry.

Thanks,

Janet Brown

#### 2.

Dear Mr Jones,

Stock Control Software System

Thank you for your letter of 1st September and the information you sent regarding the stock control system offered by your company. I certainly feel the system will meet our requirements. However, there are some points which I would like clarified before we go ahead and order the system.

Firstly, although you mentioned that the system has recently been updated, I wondered whether we might be eligible for a discount on any future upgrades.

Secondly, the installation and implementation period of three weeks, to which you refer in your letter, seems rather long. Is there any possibility of getting the system up and running on a shorter timescale?

I would be very grateful for a swift response to these queries in order that we can begin the process as soon as possible. Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

(signature)

Ms J. Brown  
Purchasing Manager

## II. Types of cover letters

The term “**cover letter**” is used for four kinds of letters:

1. **A short letter sent together with something** to explain what you are sending.
2. **A job application letter** sent together with a CV.
3. **An academic cover letter**, i.e. an application for a university position/scholarship/fellowship/admission to a course of study, also sent with a CV. The academic cover letter is usually longer than a job application letter and emphasis is on academic achievements. In fact, it can be similar to a **personal statement**.
4. **A grant application cover letter** is similar to a **statement of proposed activity**. Completion of a detailed application form provided by the relevant grant agency/institution together with the statement of proposed activity is, at present, the most common way of applying for a grant.

## III. Cover letter template

All the parts of the cover letter are flush against the left margin.

### Your address

Place your address in the upper left-hand/right-hand corner. It is common practice **not to give the name of the sender** above the address. Instead, the name is typed below the signature. Do not use diacritical marks (Hruskova, Alesova).

Example:

*Manesova 13*

*301 00 Pilsen*

*Czech Republic*

*Tel.: .....*

*E-mail: .....*

Skip a line between the address and the date. You do not have to write the address if the letter is printed on paper with the company letterhead already on it.

### **Date**

Contrary to Czech usage, **the name of the place is not given** with the date. The date is written either with the full name of the month (30 August 2012/30th August 2012) or with slashes (30/08/12), not with dots as in Czech. Skip a line between the date and the address of the recipient.

### **Address of the recipient**

The address of the recipient includes his/her **full name and title(s)**.

Example:

*Professor John A. Smith BSc(Eng) MSc PhD  
Head of Department of Electrical Engineering  
Faculty of Engineering  
The University of Nottingham  
34 University Park  
Nottingham NG7 2RD  
United Kingdom*

If you are not sure whom the letter should be addressed to, use **a job title**, e.g. *Director of Human Resources, Personnel Manager, Admissions Officer*. The names of institutions/companies/agencies and posts held are capitalized.

The abbreviation **Ms /miz/** is now commonly used with women's names (instead of Mrs and Miss). Use abbreviations for Mr/Ms/Dr but spell out Professor.

Skip a line between the address of the recipient and the salutation.

### **Salutation**

If you know the name of the recipient: *Dear Ms/Mr/Dr + the last name:*

*Dear Dr Smith, Dear Ms Brown,*

*Dear Professor Stubbs,*

NOT: *Dear Mr Professor White*

If you know the position of the recipient but not the name: *Dear Admissions Officer,*

*Dear Personnel Manager,*

If you know neither the name nor the position: *Dear Sir,*

*Dear Madam,*

*Dear Sir or Madam, Dear Sir/Madam,*

*Dear Sirs or Madams, Dear Sirs/Madams,*

*To Whom It May Concern*

Skip a line between the salutation and the subject line or body.

### **Subject line (optional)**

The subject line helps the recipient to quickly find out what the letter is about.

Examples:

*Application for the position/post of ..... as advertised in (name of paper/journal) on (date)/as advertised on your website*

*Application for an entry-level position in .....*

*Application for work/industrial placement/internship/traineeship in (name of subject) at (name of company/institution) from (date) to (date)*

*Application for postdoctoral fellowship in (name of subject) at (name of institution) commencing from (date)*

*Request for a grant in the amount of ..... for (purpose)*

Skip a line between the subject line and the body of the letter.

### **Body of the letter**

The body of the letter is where you present yourself, explain to the recipient why he/she should consider your request. It usually consists of three to four paragraphs. To make the text easier to read, skip a line between the paragraphs and also before the complimentary close.

Always start the first word of the body with a capital letter.

Example:

*Dear Mr Howe,*

*With reference to the advertisement published in ....*

### **Complimentary close**

The complimentary close is typed one line below the body of the letter. If you used the recipient's name, end with *Yours sincerely/Sincerely yours*. If you did not use the recipient's name, end with *Yours faithfully/Faithfully yours*. Put a comma after the end of the closing. Skip 3-4 lines between the closing and your typed name so that there is room for your signature.

### **Signature**

Sign your name in the Czech version, i.e. with diacritic marks (Řehoř Sedláček).

### **Your Typed Name**

Type your name without diacritic marks. If desired, you can put your title/position on the line below your typed name.

Skip a line between the typed name and the enclosure.

### **Enclosure(s)/Encl(s)**

Do not put a colon (:) after these words.

Example:

*Enclosure/Encl CV*

If there are several documents enclosed, you can type their number in brackets; it is not necessary to list them.

*Enclosures (3)*

If you are submitting your cover letter by **e-mail**, use the word **Attachment** instead of *Enclosure*.

#### **IV. Short cover letters**

Examples:

##### **1. Letter replying to a request**

In reply to your letter of ....., which I received yesterday, I enclose (e.g. a brief description of the proposed project/a table with the results of our experimental measurements).

##### **2. Letter accompanying a scholarship application**

Through exploring the Internet I have learned about your scholarship schemes and eligibility criteria. As I believe that my educational background and experience meet your requirements, I am sending the completed application form, my CV, transcripts, personal statement and references to you for further consideration of my application.

##### **3. Cover letters sent with papers**

Dear Editor,

We would like to submit our paper entitled ..... by ..... and ..... for possible publication in the Journal of ..... . Please kindly acknowledge the receipt of the paper.

I have recently completed investigation into ..... . The article analyses and summarizes several new findings which I would like to publish in your journal. The manuscript was prepared according to your requirements.

#### **V. Job application/Academic cover letters**

A job/academic cover letter **should always be targeted**, i.e. it should provide information relevant to the position/scholarship/fellowship/work/placement/traineeship the applicant is seeking or to the job opening advertisement the applicant is responding to. It usually consists of 3-4 paragraphs.

Information to be provided in the **body of the letter**:

##### **First paragraph**

Explain why you are writing, name the position/scholarship/fellowship/traineeship/work placement you are applying for, state how you learned about it. Remember to include the name of mutual contact if you have one.

##### **Second paragraph/Second and third paragraphs**

Say who you are, describe what you can offer (your educational background, work experience, skills, personal qualities). Emphasize the knowledge, skills, experience that match the requirements of the position/the funding agency. Explain how the company/institution might benefit from your personal qualities and expertise.

##### **Third/Fourth paragraph**

Thank the potential employer for considering your application and give information about your intended follow-up (say you will do so, indicate how and when).

Examples:

##### **Job application letters**

###### **1.**

I am writing in response to your advertisement in (name of publication) that appeared on (date of publication). The position of (name of position) in a company that has a reputation for (e.g. for making high-quality products) is very appealing.

I have a Master's degree in (field of study) from (name of university). Currently, I am studying for a PhD degree at the same university. I will be available after completing my studies in (year). My research is focused on (subject of research). Apart from my strong theoretical background I also gained practical experience in the field (e.g. during my summer job/work placement/trainee position of ..... at ..... ).

I feel that the position currently available in your company suits my abilities, qualifications and experience very well and believe that my CV will also show that I meet the requirements for the job. I will gladly provide references if requested.

I will call you the week of (date) to set a convenient time to meet with you to discuss what I can offer (name of company). I truly appreciate your consideration.

## 2.

My name is ..... and I am interested in applying for the position of Materials Development Scientist recently advertised on monster.com. In June this year I finished my Master's degree studies at the Faculty of ....., University ..... . This Faculty is recognized as one of the best in the Czech Republic in research into thin layers and plasma technologies for creating new materials.

The skills which I developed during my studies at the University and as a research assistant at the New Technology - Research Centre in Pilsen support my candidacy for this position. As you can see from my résumé, I am qualified to operate electron microscopes and use plasma technologies for creating thin layers. I also have experience with examining optical features of materials placed on glass. I am not afraid of working with a team of associates, supporting or leading them. I have acquired teamwork skills during my team building activities.

I would very much appreciate an opportunity to discuss your specific needs and my overall abilities regarding the advertised position. I believe I would prove to be an asset to your team and your company.

With my proven ability to manage and maintain industrial projects using advanced technologies such as Virtual Reality and Digital Factory I feel that I would be able to make a significant contribution to your company's management team.

I would be grateful if you could inform me of any vacancies in your company at present or keep my information on file for any possible future openings. I would welcome hearing from you.

### **Academic cover letter**

I am applying for admission to (name of university) under the Erasmus programme for the (autumn/spring semester) of the academic year (.../...).

I graduated from the Faculty of ....., University of ....., in ..... . The topic of my Master's thesis was ..... . In ..... I enrolled for a doctoral study programme at the same University. My doctoral thesis is focused on ..... and ..... . In ..... I received the Dean's Award for excellent study results and also won the first place in the student research competition

organized by the Faculty. At present I teach an undergraduate course on ..... and participate in one of the Faculty's research projects entitled ".....".

As the research profile of the Department of ..... at the University of ..... is very close to my specialization, I believe that during my stay there I would be able to gain a new insight into my field of study. If possible, I would like to participate in the research project carried out in the ..... Laboratory as I am convinced that I would benefit greatly from such experience. I have always been interested in furthering my education, learning new things and gaining new experience. I believe that during my study stay at the University of ..... I would be able to acquire new knowledge and skills which would be useful not only for my doctoral thesis but also for my future research and career.

I look forward to experiencing the way PhD study is organized and research projects are managed in (name of the country). Last but not least, I wish to learn more about (name of the country) and its history and culture. Enclosed with my letter you will find my CV. I look forward to hearing from you.

#### **Letter requesting information**

My name is ..... and I am a PhD student at ..... . My fields of interest are gas and humidity sensors, especially electrochemical sensors.

On your website I found a wide range of such sensors. Could you let me know if it is possible to obtain a user guide for the Evaluation kit for Electrochemical and Pellistor gas sensors? It is possible to download user guides for all the other types of kits, yet not for the one I am interested in.

A course on sensors and their application is taught at our University. I would therefore be grateful if I could get more information about your sensors, some free samples of the sensor elements (if possible), and the price list. These materials would be used strictly for educational purposes.

Thank you for your kind consideration of my request.

#### **VI. Personal statement** (in Czech: motivační dopis)

A personal statement has the **form of an essay**. It is usually submitted on request (by the relevant institution/decision-making body) and is one of the documents required when applying for admission to a degree programme, for an academic post/a scholarship/a fellowship. The other documents usually include the completed application form (provided by the relevant institution), CV, transcripts, references. The personal statement adds information that is not included in the application form and CV; its style is more personal. It should present an all-round picture of the applicant, including their academic/professional achievements and plans for the future as well as their voluntary work and free-time activities. It is 1-2 pages long.

Example:

My name is ..... and I am currently studying for a PhD degree in ..... at the Department of ....., Faculty of ....., the University of ..... . I hold a Bachelor's degree in ..... and I also have

a Master's degree in the same field. I have always been interested in science, especially in mathematics and computer science. Enrolling for a PhD degree course and continuing with the research I started while studying for the Master's degree was a natural next step for me. The topic of my doctoral thesis is ..... . As this is my first year as a PhD student, the date of the final state examination has not been set yet. However, I would like to complete my studies in less than three years and sit for the examination no later than ..... .

My research is quite similar to the research carried out at your Department of ..... . It is focused on optimization of models based on random fields while the research performed by your Department utilizes such models for pattern recognition of ..... . I have developed and optimized several models and tested them. I am now preparing a paper presenting the results of this research and expect it to be published this year. I am also concerned with ..... and interested especially in the syntactic approach. I am trying to find a way to combine this approach with the classical statistical approach, i.e. the random fields. I believe it would be interesting to study this issue at your Department because it may increase the performance of pattern recognition systems.

I have an independent, scientific and technical way of thinking. I am skilled in several programming languages, e.g. .... . I am also an advanced user of both Linux-based and Windows operating systems and web-based techniques such as ..... . I often employ many different software solutions to present the results of my research and am familiar with a number of other computer technologies which could be useful for research in the field. I have no problem with searching for new information and understanding scientific papers.

I am actively involved in organizing and promoting science in the community through the University's annual 'Science and technology in the Streets' event which popularizes science through practical demonstrations and hands-on experience. I am a long-serving member of the Scouting movement in the Czech Republic and a member of an Irish music band.

I am a fluent speaker of English, but my English is not as perfect as I would wish it to be. This is another very important reason for my interest in studying abroad, namely in an English-speaking country. I also speak French, but only at beginners' level as I started to learn it only recently. I am also trying to learn Spanish, but I do not have enough time for regular classes. I hope there will be an opportunity to attend a course in Spanish if I have a chance to join your Department.

## **VII. Grant application/Grant proposal cover letter**

### **First paragraph**

Introduce your proposal/project and state the amount you are requesting.

### **Second paragraph/Second and third paragraphs**

Say what your department/team/institution does, explain why you consider your project/proposal to be good and how it matches the objectives and guidelines of the funding agency/institution.

### **Third/Fourth paragraph**

Elaborate on your institution's support for the proposal/project, indicate the funding coming from other sources and give the name and position of the contact person.

**Fourth/Fifth paragraph**

Thank the recipient for considering your request.

**Note:** The letter should be signed by the legal representative of your institution.

**Enclose** documents supporting your application.

**VIII. Statement of proposed activity**

The statement of proposed activity gives the same facts as paragraphs 1-5 described under the grant application cover letter. It is part of a grant application/proposal, which also includes a very detailed application form provided by the relevant grant agency/institution.