Writing a Personal Statement

5TVWO preparation international internship

Introduction

For your international internship, you will likely be writing personal statements to several organisations or companies you are interested in. In a personal statement (sometimes also referred to as a motivation letter or cover letter) you introduce yourself, explain what you are applying for, why you are interested in the company, and try to convince the company to take you on. It is important to be clear and to the point, yet informative and formal at the same time. This explanation can help you further on your way to writing a proper personal statement.

 Be aware what your goal is when you are writing this: to get an interview for the internship (for example through Teams, Zoom or by a phone call) or be accepted directly as an intern. It is important that you highlight your good sides without saying things that are unrealistic or untrue, that you sound enthusiastic yet polite and that you explain carefully why it is this specific organisation or programme you are interested in. You write in a formal register. You can use the format indicated below; do not forget to leave a blank line between every part.

**Structure cover letter or personal statement**

Likely, you will not be writing a letter by hand, but an e-mail.

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| **Subject line** | Internship application/ international internship (or something similar)Keep it short and to the point. |
| **Opening words** | Dear Sir/Madam (if you don’t know the name)Dear Mr/ Ms Smith (if you know the surname of the person you are writing to)Try to find some sort of contact name on the website, this immediately makes your note more polite. |
| **Several paragraphs** | Every paragraph should be preceded andfollowed by a white line. Within the paragraph, there should not be any blank spaces. Paragraphs should consist of at least three sentences; the first paragraph can be an exception. |
| ***Introduction sentence*** | State in one sentence why you are writing this letter. Be as specific as possible. You usually start with ‘I am writing to’. |
| ***Paragraph 1*** | Apart from the introduction sentence, paragraph 1 explains about the international internship and also allows you to introduce yourself. |
| ***Paragraph 2*** | In paragraph 2, you explain why you want to do your internship at this company or organisation. Try to focus on the company or organisation itself, and also look into the company, for example by reading their vision or mission statement online. You can also connect your own line of studies to your reason to apply to this organisation. In addition, you can explain why you chose this country (for example because the language attracts you or you are considering studying there, or you have friends or family there who can help you around).  |
| ***Paragraph 3*** | In paragraph 3 you indicate why you are perfect for this internship. Explain, for example, about your own personal qualities, any work experience you may already have, and your own education – definitely mention the bilingual programme.  |
| ***Optional: paragraph 4*** | Paragraph 4 is a perfect final paragraph to provide any further details about the internship and ask any questions you may have. |
| **Final sentences** | End with indicating what you add in the attachement (e.g. CV and the introduction letter from school) and that you are available for an interview, and a single polite sentence. For example: I look forward to hearing from you soon. |
| **Closing words** | Yours faithfully (if you started with Dear Sir/Madam)Yours sincerely (if you started with Dear Mr/ Ms Smith) |
| **Your first and last name, followed by details (e.g. e-mail and phone number)** | Lotte van der Veldenl.van.der.velden@broklede.nl0031 6 738 98 665 |

Writing Tips For Formal Writing

**Linkers and connectors**Ideally, paragraphs should be well connected to each other. Order your paragraphs as well as the content of the paragraph so that each one follows logically from the previous one. To make this logic more obvious, you can use connectors, so that the paragraphs flow better and the reader is always kept on track. The easiest way of doing this is by using words like first, second, similarly, likewise, yet, nevertheless, however, etc.

Note that when linkers and connectors are used at the beginning of a sentence, they are always followed by a comma, e.g.:

However, what I lack in work experience I make up for in enthusiasm

Also, I have done an Anglia English course…

Secondly, I was wondering if…

Always avoid starting sentences with AND, BUT, BECAUSE, SO. These are connectors, and connectors are meant to connect sentences, not to separate them. Use another appropriate linking word instead.

**Formal and informal language**

Always make sure to write using formal language. Some big differences between formal and informal language can be found here.

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| **Formal language** | **Informal language** |
| Avoids personal pronouns directly speaking to the reader (‘you’ and ‘we’).“People should be able to decide on adopting dogs without having to worry about taxes.” | Uses personal pronouns.“When you take a dog, you should be able to do so without worrying about taxes.” |
| Uses formal and/ or advanced vocabulary.“Are the children all right?”“It was raining very hard.”“I am going to do that.”“I want to become a doctor.”“That does not seem appropriate behaviour.” | Uses colloquial English (‘street language’), phrasal verbs, colloquialism, basic vocabulary (‘spreekwoorden’) and slang.“Are the kids okay?”“It was raining cats and dogs.”“I’m gonna do that” “I wanna become a doctor”“That is not nice.” |
| No contractions.Is not, does not, do not, etc. | ContractionsIsn’t, doesn’t, don’t, etc. |
| No abbreviations.Doctor, etcetera | AbbreviationsDr, etc. |
| No strong feelings or emotional language“This is incredible.” “Many people dislike this.” | Uses strong feelings or emotional language“This absurd to believe” “Everybody hates that” |
| Objective (little use of personal pronoun ‘I’ and little use of opinion words unless necessary). | Subjective (strong use of personal pronoun ‘I’ and lots of use of opinion words). |

Writing A CV

A CV or resume is a structured list of details about you and your accomplishments, and is usually added to a cover letter, so a company can see in a quick glance to what extent you are suitable for their organisation. Your CV or resume usually contains the information below, and should aim to be no longer than 1 A4 page. To write your own CV, you are allowed to use an online template (make sure to use a free tool, so you can download the CV from the website and deliver it).

**Structure CV or Resume**

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| **Personal details** | Personal details include your choice of full name, date of birth, address, phone number, e-mail address, and sometimes indicates nationality, driving license or marital status. Sometimes, you can also add links to any professional (social) media, such as a LinkedIn, a personal website or a work-related Twitter or Instagram account. Do not list any private social media. |
| ***Optional: summary*** | Sometimes a CV has a summary, in which you state in a few sentences who you are and what you are looking for. |
| ***Optional: picture*** | Sometimes a CV has a professional looking portrait picture. Do not include any obvious selfies or holiday pictures! |
| **Education** | Include your degrees after primary school. Indicate also what institution your degree is from, where the institution is located, how many years the education was, and any highlights to your education. Semesters abroad are listed separately. Also start with your current education first, and leave out primary education, as this is generally assumed. On a regular CV, you will usually list your work experience first, but as you will not have much experience yet at this point, start out with your education instead. |
| **Work experience** | Include your work experience; the companies you worked for, their location, and the years you worked there. Sometimes, you can also add the name of a person who might provide you with a reference. Work experience may include both paid work and voluntary work, as well as internships. You also start with the most recent or current work experience first. |
| **Qualifications** | Add any further qualifications you may have received outside your school and university, for instance a language or leadership course. |
| **Languages** | Add the languages you speak and at what level you speak them. You can use the CEFR to indicate your level, which ranges from A1/A2 (beginner), to B1/B2 (intermediate) and C1/C2 (advanced/ proficient). You use the term ‘native speaker’ for your mother tongue.  |
| **Skills** | Add any skills you may have, and the level of these skills (for example, beginner, intermediate, advanced or excellent). Skills may include for example computer or writing skills. |
| ***Optional: personal qualities*** | Add a list of adjectives to indicate personal qualities (see below). Think of terms such as good listener/ communicator, leader, quick learner, flexible, accurate, helpful, organised, excellent interpersonal skills, kind, approachable, diplomatic, positive, strong teamwork, willing to learn, motivated, resourceful, strong sense of responsibility, loyal, etc. With this as with the next item, try not to overdo it: 3-6 items is enough. |
| ***Optional: interests*** | Add a list of personal interests, such as arts, sports, or other possibilities. |
| ***Optional: reference*** | If you believe someone could provide you with a good reference, such as a teacher or former employer, you can list them here, but ONLY if you have discussed this with that person in advance! |

Appendix A. Useful Phrases For Personal Statements

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| Opening cover letter/ applying to a post | I am writing to …I am writing in response to your advertisement in the Sunday TimesI am writing to express my interest in the …. position at … (company name).I am writing to apply for the post of…which you advertised in…on… I am writing in response to your advertisement posted on…I wish to apply for the post of…which you advertised in…on… I am writing in response to your advertisement posted on…I refer to your advertisement in…dated… .I read your advertisement for an experienced…in the…issue of…with great interest.I would like to apply for the position of…As a recent graduate with …. experience, I believe I am a strong candidate for a position at … (company name) |
| Explaining why you are interested in the company | I am particularly interested in this job, as…I would like to work for you, in order to… |
| Explaining why you are good for the position | My strengths are…I would be well suited to the position because…My professional qualifications / skills appear to be well suited to your company's requirements.During my time as ..., I improved / furthered / extended / my knowledge of…My area of expertise is…In addition to my responsibilities as..., I also developed…skills. |
| Explaining any deficiencies  | I would say that my only weakness / weaknesses are… . But I am looking to improve in this / these area/s.Although I have no previous experience in…, I have had…I would be happy to/ am quite willing to |
| Talking about your education | My education includes a degree from XY university.I have been studying (subject) for 3 years.I have recently graduated from…I am graduating from … in …I am studying for my undergraduate/ bachelor/ graduate/ master degree in (studies) at (University)I am in year four/ my first year/ my final year of the (programme name) bachelor programme at (University)I am at secondary school/ high schoolI have finished/ am doing bilingual pre-university (VWO) education/ general secondary education (HAVO) at (school) |
| Pre-closing | I am highly motivated and look forward to the varied work which a position in your company would offer me.I would welcome the opportunity to discuss further details of the position with you personally.I am available for interview on…Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to the opportunity to personally discuss why I am particularly suited to this position. Please contact me via… |
| Enclosing documents | I am enclosing ... Please find enclosed ... You will find enclosed ...Please find my résumé / CV attached. |
| Closing | I look forward to hearing from you.I look forward to your reply. |

Appendix B. Example Personal Statement

Subject: Internship Application

Dear Ms Jones,

I am a secondary school student from the Netherlands writing to inquire after the possibilities of doing a one week internship at your company. I am in my pre final year at school in the bilingual stream, a programme taught in both English and Dutch in which internationalisation is important. In this programme, students of my year are required to do a one week internship or work experience in an international environment, and I was wondering if it would be possible to do this at your company.

Your company attracted me as I have always had an interest in graphic design. I am following IT as well as arts classes at school, and graphic design is something I see as a possible future line of studies. I would love to be able to see more of the everyday work at a graphic design company. I found your company online and your aim at improving a small business’s branding really spoke to me, as branding is an area of graphic design that specifically attracts my attention.

I do not have any work experience yet, but hope to make up for this with my enthusiasm and genuine interest in your company. I am flexible, communicative and quick to adapt to new situations. I also have a small arts portfolio which I would love to share with you. I will do my best to perform any tasks you may be asking of me.

In the attachment, I am adding my CV as well as an introduction letter about the international internship from my school’s internship coordinator. I would love the opportunity to further discuss the internship you with you through an interview and am adding my contact details below. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Adam Lavinsky

a.lavinsky@gmail.com

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