

## LETTER OF INTENT TIPS

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### WHAT IS A LETTER OF INTENT?

You send a letter of intent (sometimes called a letter of interest) with your curriculum vitae (CV) to a potential residency program. In short, you write a letter of intent to express interest in completing a particular residency program. Similar to a cover letter, a letter of intent offers you a chance to distinguish yourself from other applicants and demonstrate your fit with the program and institution. Your letter of intent should highlight your knowledge, skills, and experiences that will allow you to be successful in that residency program. You may also discuss your future career goals and how the residency program experience will help you achieve them.

### HOW DOES A LETTER OF INTENT DIFFER FROM A COVER LETTER?

In general, you use a letter of intent when applying to a residency program. Alternatively, you use a cover letter when applying for an employment position. A letter of intent and a cover letter share more similarities than differences and people sometimes use the terms interchangeably. Both letters allow you to introduce yourself; express interest in a position; differentiate yourself from other applicants; convey your “fit” with the program or organization; and discuss your knowledge, skills, and experiences that will contribute to your future success within that program or organization.

Where letters of intent and cover letters differ, however, is in terms of **focus**. In a cover letter, you focus on how your unique qualifications will meet the employer’s needs. In a letter of intent, you focus on your reasons for pursuing additional pharmacy training and how the residency program will help you achieve your career goals.

### SHOULD YOU WRITE A LETTER OF INTENT TO GO WITH YOUR CV WHEN APPLYING FOR A RESIDENCY POSITION?

**Absolutely!** Your letter of intent is a necessary companion and will be almost as important as your CV. In addition to providing a chance to review your writing skills, the potential residency program will use your letter of intent to answer the following questions and determine if you deserve consideration for their program:

- Why is the writer interested in a residency program? Why is my program their top choice?
- What are the writer’s goals during residency?
- What knowledge, skills, and experiences does the writer have that will help them be successful in my residency program?
- What are the writer’s plans after residency? Does the writer indicate how my residency program’s training will help them achieve those goals?

## **CAN YOU USE THE SAME LETTER OF INTENT FOR ALL OF THE CVs YOU SEND OUT?**

**No.** You should always customize the letter as much as possible to a specific residency program. Customizing requires pre-work before writing your letter of intent. Research the residency program and institution. Use this research to clearly articulate clearly why you are interested in this specific residency program and how your knowledge, skills, and experiences will make you a successful resident. Like a cover letter, you will use brief examples and stories from your academic and work experiences to support your claims.

## **HOW SHOULD YOU ORGANIZE YOUR LETTER OF INTENT?**

Your letter of intent should have the following parts:

### Salutation (greeting)

Your letter should be addressed to a specific person using a formal greeting, when possible. You should always address the person using the correct title (e.g., Dr., Professor) and follow the name with a colon (e.g., Dear Dr. Smith:).

If you are unable to obtain a person's name by doing research online or calling the institution to ask, acceptable ways to address the letter include:

- Dear Pharmacy Residency Director:
- Dear Selection Committee:

Never guess at gender identity. If you do not know, simply address the letter using the person's full name.

### Opening

State your interest in applying for a resident position. Include how and where you learned about the position or program (e.g., ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting). Briefly explain why you are interested in the program – begin to emphasize how the program will help you achieve your professional goals.

### Body paragraph(s)

Within the body paragraph(s), answer the following questions:

- Why are you pursuing a residency? Why do you want to pursue a residency in this specific program?
- What are your goals during residency? Identify possible challenges and obstacles you may encounter during residency and use examples to explain how your skills and experiences will help you overcome them to succeed during residency.
- What are your career goals? How will this specific residency program help you achieve them?

You may wish to dedicate one paragraph to each question. In answering the questions, highlight specific knowledge, skills, and experiences that will make you a successful resident, but do not use the exact wording of your CV. Incorporate your research about the program and institution to convey your fit. Use brief examples to support your claims.

### Conclusion

Reiterate your interest in and your fit for the residency program and institution. You may request an interview to discuss your qualifications further. Thanking a person for their consideration or time puts a positive and clear end to the letter.

### Complimentary Closing

End with a complimentary closing. Then, skip four lines and type your name. Spell your name as it appears in your formal signature and letterhead. Sign your letter between the closing and your name. Typical complimentary closings in business correspondences include:

- Respectfully,
- Best regards,
- Sincerely,
- Thank you,

### **HOW SHOULD YOU FORMAT YOUR LETTER OF INTENT?**

Use a standard business letter style to format your letter of intent. The most used business letter styles include block, modified block, and modified semi-block formats. The block style is the most common format for healthcare professionals, which is used in the example below.

Your letter of intent and CV should look similar since you will send them together.

- Use the same font used on your CV. Use size 10–12-point font.
- Use the same letterhead used on your CV.
- Left, right, top, and bottom margins should never be less than 1". Do not shorten the margins to squeeze your letter onto a single page. Either edit out some material or go onto a second page. Remember, be brief but detailed.
- Paragraphs should be separated by a space rather than an indent. Including white space in your letter makes it easier to read.
- If sending your letter electronically, save it as a PDF file with a clear title (e.g., B. Badger Letter of Intent) to avoid unpredictable formatting changes.
- If printing your letter, use the same paper you used for your CV.

The organization and format information outlined above is reiterated more concisely on the next page.

### **WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU DO WHEN COMPOSING A LETTER OF INTENT?**

You want to sound genuine and sincere yet maintain professionalism. Below are a few more tips that may help:

- Review the residency program's application instructions to determine if there are any specific letter of intent requirements (e.g., content, length).
- Use personal pronouns (e.g., I, you).
- Avoid vague statements. Quantify what you can.
- Strive to portray yourself and your skills in a positive tone without sounding boastful.
- Never refer negatively to past or current positions.
- Keep your letter to one page in length whenever possible.
- Keep paragraphs concise. Vary the sentence length.
- Be a real person – show some personality and enthusiasm.
- Check (and double-check) for typos and grammatical errors – ask someone else to proofread!

## LETTERHEAD

**DATELINE**

**ADDRESS**

**SALUTATION:**

**OPENING PARAGRAPH:** State your interest in applying for a resident position. Include how and where you learned about the position or program. Briefly explain why you are interested in the program – begin to emphasize how the program will help you achieve your professional goals.

**BODY PARAGRAPH(s):** Answer the following questions. You may wish to structure your body paragraphs by answering one question per paragraph. In answering the questions: highlight specific knowledge, skills, and experiences that will make you a successful resident; incorporate your research about the program and institution to convey your fit; and use brief examples to support your claims.

- Why are you pursuing a residency? Why do you want to pursue a residency in this specific program?
- What are your goals during residency? Identify possible challenges and obstacles you may encounter during residency and use examples to explain how your skills and experiences will help you overcome them to succeed during residency.
- What are your career goals? How will this specific residency program help you achieve them?

**CLOSING PARAGRAPH:** Reiterate your interest in and your fit for the residency program and institution. Open the door for an interview. Thank the person for their consideration. Be confident!

**COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE,**

**SIGNATURE BLOCK**