

# Professional Pearls for Writing a Pharmacy Residency Letter of Intent

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*Whether it is your first job or a pharmacy practice residency, preparing your application can be a daunting task for the first-time applicant. In this article, we will discuss how to prepare a letter of intent, as well as how it differs from a cover letter.*

## **What is a letter of intent and how does it differ from a cover letter?**

While the two are very similar, there are slightly different variations of each type of letter. Another way to describe this is to compare a resumé to a curriculum vitae. Although both of them contain much of the same information, each one serves a different function. You do not need to send a cover letter if you are sending a letter of intent, or vice versa.

A cover letter is typically a professional correspondence or a business letter that states your purpose for writing, reason for interest, and qualifications. It will usually end by directing the reader to your attached resumé or curriculum vitae, and contain contact information for questions/comments. Overall, a cover letter is simply a way to introduce you to a potential employer.

In contrast, a letter of intent (or letter of interest) is generally more comprehensive. It not only addresses the objectives outlined for a cover letter, but also defines your career objectives and goals, professional experience, leadership skills, and unique attributes to set you apart from the rest. Too often, the emerging Generation X and Y population forgets to emphasize what they can offer to the organization. Remember, a job or residency is a two-way street: both the employee and the employer should benefit.

## **How long should my letter of intent be?**

Keep in mind that larger residency programs may receive up to 200 applicants or more! As such, remember to keep your reader in mind. Choose sentence structures that project your message without losing focus. Generally speaking, you should format the letter with 1 inch margins and 11-12 point font.

Ensure that your letter does not exceed a one to two page maximum. Highlight only important characteristics – bypassing lesser characteristics for the interview. Employers are not going to decide whether to interview you solely based on your letter, but it is a screening tool to exclude candidates. Your first impression starts here! Remember this simple statement: “less is more.”

## **What are they looking for?**

First and foremost, most programs are looking for a match with a purpose. If you want to become an inpatient pediatric pharmacist, but are applying to an ambulatory geriatric program, your application will seldom receive a second glance. Keep your letter specific to your potential employer.

Secondly, be sure that your letter will be received well before the deadline. Most programs do not consider late applications. Take extra effort in the planning process to ensure that all application materials reach their intended destination on time.

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Thirdly, employers use this letter to gauge your writing skills and essentially your ability to communicate effectively. Take the time to spell check the letter; do not merely rely on the computer's automatic grammar check, which may miss important errors. You don't want the one typo to be the only thing the reader remembers about you! Windows® Narrator and notepad are useful to have the computer to read the letter back to you. Words that may look the same, but are pronounced differently, quickly become evident. If these computer applications are not accessible, read the letter aloud from start to finish, which may catch other errors. It may be beneficial as well to have someone else read your letter back to you.

Finally, the best recommendation is to ask a preceptor or peer who excels in editing to review your letter, and provide feedback on grammar, clarity, brevity, and content. Take the time to ensure letters are appropriately addressed. Sending a letter to Program A that is addressed to Program B does not bode well and can be interpreted as carelessness on your part.

A poorly written letter can end your candidacy.

### **Some other miscellaneous tips and tricks:**

Don't rush to write the letter in one sitting. Find an example of what other people have written (see example below). Don't rely solely on your peers to help you edit the letter – the people hiring you are from a different generation. Avoid slang or colloquial grammar, your letter is written in a professional tone. If you can, consider taking your letter to a writing center for input on grammar and content.

Be careful of using a mail merger in Microsoft Word® -- it may be troublesome if you are not familiar with the product. If wielded well, it can be an excellent tool, but you should still visually review each letter.

An excellent reference is The Pharmacy Professional's Guide to Résumés, CVs, and Interviewing by Thomas P. Reinders. This book offers sample cover letters, CVs, resumes, interview questions, and a multitude of other helpful tools. It should be in every pharmacy student's library.

Remember: You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

## What would an example letter look like?

When it comes to writing a letter of intent, there is no real format that must be followed. This, however is one example of a well-written letter of intent (***DO not to copy this format exactly, others are using it too. You should tailor this to your own personality.***):

[ Insert Date]

[ Insert Addressee, Degree ]

[ Insert the Addressee's Position ]

[ Insert Institution or Establishment ]

[ Address of Establishment ]

[ City, State ZIP ]

Dear [ Insert Addressee ]:

Thank you for meeting with me at the ASHP Mid-Year Clinical Meeting to discuss your residency program. As you may know, I am a fourth-year Doctor of Pharmacy Candidate at [ Insert School], and I am interested in pursuing a pharmacy practice residency at [ Insert Institution or Establishment]. My career goal is to practice in a tertiary-teaching hospital as a clinical pharmacist in critical care.

A pharmacy practice residency provides the opportunity to refine my skills and meet the challenges of a changing health care environment. I desire to learn how to best provide medical care according to the best known therapy. I hope to do this by further developing my knowledge in disease management through the oversight of medication regimens.

My training at [ Insert School] has provided me with exceptional skills in my training as a pharmacist. However, the knowledge of medicine extends far beyond the classroom. There is more training that has yet to be mastered, and I am excited to begin this lifelong learning. I believe that residency would give me the jumpstart necessary to begin refining my clinical skills for providing optimal patient care. This experience would also provide the opportunity to further develop my leadership skills. Through mentorship from experienced pharmacists, I will become a more effective leader ready to help shape the future of pharmacy.

I believe that I would be a highly qualified candidate for your residency program, which requires drive, innovation, and clear communication. My leadership abilities and professional experiences allow me to complete tasks in a timely manner. My peers describe me as a well-organized person, who is adaptable to meet challenges as they arise. I think creatively – visualizing the larger picture while still focusing on the details. With proficient oral and written communication skills, I work efficiently and cohesively with others. Furthermore, my solid understanding of computer technology has helped me provide quick and accurate patient care.

The selection of the residency program at [ Establishment or Institution ] is centered on the commitment of the institution to the resident. I feel that this program offers excellent mentors to guide me as I progress through my pharmacy training. I value the opportunity to pursue my interests in [ pediatrics OR critical care OR general adult care, etc] at a nationally recognized medical facility. Finally, I want to be involved in a program that allows me to mentor and help train other health care professionals as a means to give back to the medical community.

A residency at [ Establishment or Institution ] would contribute to my career goals to become a better clinical pharmacist by providing a unique experience in [ pediatrics OR critical care OR general adult care, etc]. I have enclosed my curriculum vitae, which contains additional information about my professional experiences and skills. I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you and your staff for an interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [yourname@domain.com](mailto:yourname@domain.com) or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Your Name

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