



Letters of Intent & Update Letters

A concise field guide to saying exactly what changed, why the school fits, and what you will do next - without sounding desperate.

PURPOSE BEFORE PROSE

Three letters. Three different promises.

Do not begin with a template. Begin with the truth you can support and the policy the school has published.

TYPE	WHAT IT SAYS	USE IT WHEN	DO NOT USE IT WHEN
Letter of intent	"If admitted, I will enroll."	You have interviewed, this is your genuine first choice, and the school accepts correspondence.	You are undecided, comparing aid, or have made the same promise elsewhere.
Letter of interest	"I remain strongly interested, and here is why the fit is specific."	You can name concrete, current reasons for fit without promising enrollment.	Your only message is "please interview me," or the school says no updates.
Update letter	"Materially new information strengthens my candidacy."	You have a substantive achievement, role, result, publication, grade, or responsibility to report.	The news is routine continuation, future plans, or padding.

First gate: check the school's instructions. Policies differ. Stanford's published policy, for example, accepts updates only after an interview invitation. AAMC guidance also emphasizes following each school's own processes.

Intent is exclusive

Send it to one school only. The value is the credibility of a real commitment.

Interest is specific

Name the fit. Generic admiration adds no useful signal.

Updates are new

Report what changed, quantify it, and explain why it matters.

MAKE THE FILE EASIER TO EVALUATE

Admissions readers want signal, not volume.

A useful letter changes the committee's information. It does not simply restate your enthusiasm.

1. A visible purpose

State the letter type and the reason for writing in the first two sentences.

2. Material new evidence

Use verifiable outcomes: hours completed, people served, responsibility gained, manuscript status, grades posted, or an award received.

3. School-specific fit

Connect one or two program features to work you have already done or a direction you can credibly pursue.

4. Decision clarity

If this is intent, say "I will enroll if admitted." If it is interest, do not blur the line with "top choice" language.

5. Low-friction format

Keep it to one page unless the portal gives a different limit. Include your full name, AAMC ID, date, and a descriptive subject line.

The credibility test

Could an admissions reader verify the update, understand why it matters, and distinguish this school from the others on your list?

Do not manufacture news. "I continued volunteering" is not automatically an update. "I completed 180 additional hours and now train six volunteers" is new scope and responsibility.

Reality check: No letter guarantees an interview, admission, or waitlist movement. Its job is narrower: to add credible information and clarify fit at the right time.

DRAFT FROM STRUCTURE

A strong letter moves in five steps.

1. Identify yourself and the purpose

Give your full name, AAMC ID, application stage, and one direct sentence: intent, interest, or update.

2. Lead with what changed

Put the strongest new fact first. State the result, not the backstory.

3. Explain the significance

Show what the update demonstrates about your readiness, judgment, service, scholarship, or sustained commitment.

4. Tie it to this school

Use one or two specific connections. A program name alone is not fit; explain what you would bring to and learn from it.

5. Close with the exact ask

Ask that the information be added to your file. For intent, repeat the commitment once. Thank the committee and stop.

Target length

250–400 words is usually enough for a one-page letter with breathing room.

Subject line

**Application Update - First Last - AAMC ID
12345678**

Channel matters. Use the portal if the school specifies one. If instructions name an email address, send a readable PDF unless the school requests text in the email body.

FREE PREVIEW · WHAT'S INSIDE THE FULL GUIDE

Letters of Intent & Update Letters Pack

You've read the opening pages. Here is everything else the guide covers:

- Decision guide: intent vs. interest vs. update letters
- Reader logic: what actually earns attention
- The five-move letter framework
- Annotated template: letter of intent
- Annotated template: achievement update
- Annotated template: pre-interview interest letter
- Annotated template: waitlist update + interest
- Timing calendar from interview to waitlist
- Five mistakes that backfire, and the send-ready checklist

Get the full guide — \$12