

# PLAY YOUR **ACE!**

Student Guidelines  
and Tips for Successful  
Applications



Erasmus  
Mundus



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## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees applications can be intimidating and frustrating. The programme in itself may seem very complex, with all its different courses, projects, scholarship levels, etc.

When you start understanding what is all about, you are faced with a new challenge, i.e. preparing a successful application. How can you take time to sit down and deal with all that?

GOOD NEWS! These guidelines, prepared in collaboration with students and alumni, will guide you step-by-step through the application process and help you create an award-winning application!

## UNDERSTAND “HOW IT ALL WORKS”

*“An expert is someone who knows more and more about less and less”*

Nicholas M. Butler

The first important thing to keep in mind before applying for an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree is that you need to have an overall understanding of the application process, its different steps and.. of course, the deadlines!

**Search, search, search.** Identifying ‘THE right programme for you’ is the first step towards a successful application. There are thousands of joint programmes available to students through internet searches and scholarship guides, but no student will ever qualify for all of them. The more time you can put into your scholarship search, the more suitable options you will have. However, note that you will need time to research for scholarships, request information and application materials and complete your application. Choice is important: only select the programmes you are eligible for and truly interested in!

**Navigate..!** Visit the website of the programme(s) you have selected. You will need to apply directly to the specific programme, (usually) via the programme website.

**Read, read, read!** Read the programme application guidelines carefully. These are always published on the programme website and include information about the deadlines for application (which vary between programmes, so pay close attention to these!), as well as the requested documents to submit your application! Make sure that you understand all the steps and requirements.

**Watch the deadline like a hawk.** When you are applying to many programmes at once, it is easy to confuse the deadlines and send the applications on the wrong date. To avoid this, you should keep a calendar either on paper or online. Write the name of each programme in your calendar, for instance in red on its deadline, and in black one week before the deadline. Try to get scholarship applications in before the black (early) deadline but make sure that you get it in before the final deadline.

**Start early!** You will have to submit several documents together with your application. Preparing and collecting such documents may require several weeks, so allow enough time. The most commonly requested documents are: Motivation letter; Recommendation letters; Transcript of records; Language Certificate. Make sure to include an English translation (if not specified differently) of the requested document. It is recommended that the translation is done by a court interpreter but it is not always compulsory. Also, if the application is online, documents should be scanned and then uploaded, preferably as a PDF file. If a document scan/copy consists of multiple images for each page, you should upload them compressed into one zip file.

**Get it right!** Send your application directly to the co-ordinators of your selected programme, via the programme website or via email depending on the programme requirements (detailed information on this is indicated on the respective programme(s) website(s).)

## **GET USED TO ERASMUS+ TERMINOLOGY**

Ever wondered what Erasmus+, and Erasmus Mundus, is all about?

We are aware that such 'uni staff language' or 'European Commission language' (as students tend to call it) might be confusing for potential applicants. Since many Joint Master Degrees websites do, however, use the above terminology,

we thought it might be useful to provide some 'student-friendly' definitions here. It is essential to understand for which programme or 'category' your applying for before starting the application process.

**Erasmus+:** it is new EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, launched by the European Commission on 1 January 2014. Erasmus+ brings together all the current EU and international schemes for education, training, youth and sport (including Erasmus Mundus). The overall aim is to increase efficiency, make it easier to apply for grants, as well as reducing duplication and fragmentation. For students and researchers this means increased funding for their international academic and research career.

**Erasmus Mundus:** up to 2013, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (now included in the wider Erasmus+ programme) used to be called Erasmus Mundus Master Courses. It is good to be aware of this double terminology when searching for your programme on the web.

**Coordinator:** every Joint Master has a coordinating university, i.e. a university which is responsible for the overall management of the programme, including the application process.

**Consortium/Partnership:** the group of universities who offers a specific Joint Master is often referred to as 'Consortium' or 'Partnership'. Universities are then often referred to as 'Partners'.

**Mobility:** the term 'mobility' within Erasmus+ refers to 'academic mobility', i.e. the opportunity to study abroad for a certain period of time.

## **P**REPARE AN AWARD-WINNING APPLICATION!

Below are some tips to prepare a top-quality application dossier. Tips are based on selected Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree students' feedback and suggestions.

### **General 'rules'**

**The scholarship application is a paper model of you.** Make sure your application is professional and compelling. If you are reusing material (such

as a cover letter or essay) from another application, make sure to avoid typos, incorrect names or blank fields. Do not forget to sign and date your application. Do not use fancy fonts; stick with standard business fonts like Times New Roman or Arial. Legibility and neatness are extremely important. Your application can be rejected if it cannot be easily read.

**Proofread your application.** How can you increase your chance of winning in less than 30 minutes? By proofreading your application. If the reviewers spot any missing information, spelling or grammar errors, or any superficial fault in your application, your application usually goes out the window before anybody even reads it. Most scholarship committees do not even consider scholarship applications that have major blunders. Therefore ask yourself carefully: did I get the programme name and address right? What about the coordinator's name? Are there any major spelling errors? What about grammar errors? Is the header of the essay formatted correctly? Simply spending a little more time can vastly increase your chance of being selected.

**Get organized!** Keeping organized is one of the most important habits all students should develop. It helps with study time. It also helps with scholarships applications. Organizing your time is equally important. When your time is well-scheduled, you can reduce "dead time" and meet your deadlines.

**Double check the eligibility requirements of your selected programme(s).** This will save you time spent in writing unnecessary scholarship applications.

**Answer every question.** If you think that a question in the application form doesn't apply to you, don't leave it blank – it could be considered incomplete. Do not mark the question N/A (not applicable), either. The evaluators may have a different point of view on its applicability and can disqualify you for failing to complete the form. Instead, answer the question if you can. If the question is truly not applicable, write a sentence that describes your situation. For example, if the question is, "What is your military history?" it is preferable to write "I have never served in the military" rather than leave it blank or write N/A.

**Contact fellow Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees students/alumni.** Improve your application techniques by talking to previous scholarships holders. They can give you new ways to successfully approach the application process and inspire you to get started. Also, do

not be afraid to contact the programme coordinators– you may end up with valuable referrals!

**Watch for scholarship scams.** Sadly, there are many scam artists who try to make money off of gullible students, who lose millions of Euros every year to these scholarship scams! That is the bad news. Now, here is the good news – most scholarship scams are easily recognizable ... if you know how to read the signs. The cardinal rule of scholarship scams is: “If it takes money to get money, it is probably a scam.” Also, always look for the official Erasmus+ or Erasmus Mundus logo on the programme website; you may also want to double check that the programme(s) you selected are included in the official [Erasmus Mundus](#) or [Erasmus+](#) website.

## **Cover letter / Letter of motivation**

The cover is designed to give reviewers of your application a sense of your level of commitment to and knowledge of the programme to which you are applying. Cover letters that have been favourably reviewed demonstrate that the student has a thorough understanding of the programme and environment and has reflected deeply on the personal and intellectual journey he/she hope to undertake while abroad.

**Be as specific as possible.** What, in particular, attracted you to the programme? What particular courses do you hope to take while abroad and why? How do they relate to the courses you have already taken at your home university? How do you imagine the experiences in the programme will relate to your academic, professional and personal goals? In what ways do you anticipate growing, both academically and personally, from your experiences in that programme?

**Use concrete examples.** Remember, when you interview for a job, you would not say that you should be hired simply because you need a job. Rather, you prepare by researching the company to learn as much as you can about it to sell yourself as the perfect candidate for the position at that company. Approach the study statement in the same way. Link your experiences with key aspects of the programme you are applying to: change sentences such as “I’ve been a member of the Science Club” with more effective sentences such as “I’ve been an active member of the science club, participating in; this had let me to... etc.”. Research the programme, review its website and brochure, visit the web site of the partner universities and use all this information in your letter.

**Structure your letter in an effective and coherent way.** Start with a strong introduction as engaging and inviting to read as possible – if the intro isn't powerful, nobody would read the rest. Your introduction should NOT be a summary of the letter. Next, go into depth about your motivations and how your previous academic/professional path, as well as your future goals, can be linked to that particular programme. End with a strong conclusion: like for the intro, don't summarize your letter. They have just finished reading it! Link back to the intro and throw in a re-emphasis of the main point.

**Make it thoughtful.** Avoid statements like “I really want to go to *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, so that I can travel all over Brazil” – you have to prove that you are an engaged student, not an active traveller!; or like “I've always wanted to live in another country to get to know its culture/language” – this is certainly a valid reason, but it is not sufficient to apply for an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree.

**Include personal reasons and interests.** Surprisingly or not, most selection committees do not simply choose the student with the highest grade point average. Instead, most evaluators are equally interested in students' extracurricular activities. Are they involved in the community? What hobbies do they have? Grades are important, but they are only half the story. Therefore, it is to your advantage to participate in extracurricular activities. Join student unions, volunteer, start a business, find a hobby. All these activities will help to make you stand out in the selection process. Also, you should present yourself as a rational, optimistic and motivated person who is willing to learn and improve.

**Write efficiently.** Don't overkill the reader by throwing in dozens of adjectives and adverbs, concentrate on powerful nouns and verbs that do the job better and keep things shorter.

**More is not always better.** Your letter must be typed or word-processed. One page is standard for cover letters. If you keep it too short (e.g. 3 sentences) it will not be considered as a thoughtful statement. At the same time, three pages letters are too long. You want to keep your cover letter relevant to your programme, so it is important to remember that more is not always better.

**And don't forget...** that your letter of motivation will be one among hundreds, so take enough time to write it. You can write the first version, then after a few days write another one, compare them and write the best

final version. You can use the Internet to find some examples of motivation letters, read a couple of them and then write something completely different! Make sure not to copy/paste whole sentences from templates available online! You need to stand above your competition; you need to be honest but also interesting in writing so that people who are reading your letter can feel a different vibe in comparison to other applicants. Finally, proofread your letter, let other people read it, and make sure it's good enough and free of errors before you send it off.

## **Recommendation letters**

**Choose your recommenders carefully.** Think of the letters as an integral part of a package that will present an accurate and complete picture of you and your qualifications. While one letter of recommendation should usually be by an academic, one should address your leadership abilities and commitment to the community if not advised otherwise.

**Academic references should be from professors with whom you have had contact** or in whose class you excelled or from a student instructors who positively graded your work.

**Allow for enough time.** Be sure to ask your referees several weeks in advance of your deadline to allow them plenty of time to complete the reference.

**Provide your recommenders with complete information on the programme** either through a conversation with him/her or in a written statement, namely: the title of the programme which you are applying to; a brief description of that particular programme, your academic and personal interests in the programme, and what you hope to accomplish while abroad; the date the letter is due. You may also want to provide a copy of your transcript and CV. This information is important to the recommender because it will help him/her to write a highly personal reference that outlines why the recommender feels you would be a good candidate for the specific programme for which you are applying.

**Ask that the letters be on letterhead if possible.** Also, if you have to send the recommendation letters separate from the rest of the application form (this is often, but not always, the case), you should provide your recommenders with an addressed envelope, stamped if necessary.

**What if the letter does not address all of the necessary topics?** This is tricky. If you know the letter writer well, you may be able to approach them, point out the problem and ask them to add some content on that topic. If you are uncomfortable with asking for a revision, you need to seriously think about whether or not the letter is usable. Your decision may depend upon whether or not you have alternative letter writers that you can ask and how much time is left before the application needs to be submitted. In a pinch, send the letter. It would be far worse to fail to submit the correct number of recommendation letters.

**What if there is some other problem with the letter?** The support is lukewarm or the letter is not well written. Weigh the facts. If the letter is not supportive of you, look for another writer. If the contents won't win a Pulitzer Prize but the message of your worthiness for the scholarship comes across, it's probably okay.

## **Transcript of Records**

The Transcript is an important document for the student and institution. It ensures that students have an accurate and **up-to-date record of their progress**, the educational components they have taken, the number of ECTS credits they have achieved and the grades they have been awarded.

For your application, **be sure to request official copies of transcripts** of all university work. You should submit requests for transcripts to your university registrar several weeks in advance of your deadline.

## **Language Certificates**

Most applications require some language certificate, proving your knowledge of English or any other language of instruction of the specific Joint Master Degree (e.g. French, German, etc.). Sometimes you are allowed to use your transcript of records to prove your language skills if you have studied it at your faculty, but for the majority of programmes (especially for degree students) you will need to have an official language certificate.

It is good to start early to prepare for an official language test (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) since it will take some time to get the results.

# **BUST YOUR ERASMUS MUNDUS JOINT MASTERS MYTHS!**

**Still in doubt if you should or should-not apply for an Erasmus+ Joint Master Degree?** Have you gone through the programme websites and do you think that applying is too difficult or something for which there is no place in your academic/professional plans?

*Our advice: bust your myths and go for it!* Below are some of the most common myths students like you hold about Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and, more importantly, the facts that bust them.

**Myth 1. Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees are not for European students.** Wrong. The programme, and its scholarships, are open to European students as well! No matter what your gender, age, background or interests are, there are over 130 Joint Masters available and if you search, you would probably find several that suit your needs and interests.

**Myth 2. Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees are only for a very restrictive and elitist group of student.** While it is true that all programmes consider academic talent and performance as a key criterion in the selection process, the level of achievement required to be selected also depends on the other applicants' level. Additionally, some scholarships are based on criteria other than academic performance: pursuit of a particular major, extracurricular activities, or financial need.

**Myth 3. Studying abroad is a waste of time and money.** Some students (or their parents) believe that studying abroad is not really studying. The reality is quite different. In other countries the teaching methods can be different from what you are used to, but that does not make studying less valuable, on the contrary! In addition to the formal instruction you receive, very important part of learning takes place outside the classroom. You will gain experience you could never get at your national university. The entire experience abroad will change your life as well as employment potential. In fact, international companies are mostly looking for employees with the ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

**Myth 4. I have already done an Erasmus semester. Why bother with Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees?** Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees are two very different programmes. By

choosing an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree, you will study with people from all over the world (not only from all over Europe, and believe us, this makes a real difference). You will take part in a top-quality study programme – guaranteed by the European Commission quality assurance system. Moreover, you will study in two or more different universities... which, needless to say, widens your horizons impressively, both on an academic and a professional level.

**Myth 5. It is easier and just as good to travel once I have a job.** Easier said than done. Once you have a job and responsibilities, it is very difficult to get away. You may find it very difficult to get time off from work and you may find yourself in a situation where you will not be able to afford unpaid vacation because you have taken long-term financial responsibilities. In addition, travelling as a tourist gives you a very different experience from living somewhere as an integrated part of the foreign culture and its higher education system.

**Myth 6. The scholarship money is not enough to finance my studies**

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees scholarships are very generous. Although, you may claim that 1000 EUR/month are too little an amount to cover subsistence expenses in certain European countries, you have to think that studying abroad with a scholarship can be cheaper than or as expensive as studying at your national university without a scholarship, especially if you don't study in your home town. Moreover, apart from the 1000 EUR monthly allowance, you would benefit of a full insurance scheme and travel subsistence up to 1000EUR.

**Myth 7. I can only go to study abroad to the UK or U.S. because I don't speak any other foreign languages besides English.** This is a common misconception. Most Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees offer courses in English although the participating universities are in majority located in countries where English is not the first language.

## FINAL CHECKLIST

The following checklist - linking back to the one included in the first section of these guidelines - is intended to sum-up the key steps towards a successful application.

- Search for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree and other joint programmes via the Internet or contact the International Relations Office at your University.
- As far as scholarships are concerned, search for alternative sources of funding: national, institutional and international.
- After having selected the programme(s) you would like to apply for, check carefully if you are eligible to apply.
- Be aware of the deadlines!
- Learn about the application process, by reading the application guidelines of your programme(s) carefully.
- Collect all required documents.
- Take enough time to prepare an effective cover letter.
- Do a spelling and grammar check of your documents.
- Check if your documents are signed (where applicable).
- Make sure you have all documents in English (or another required language).
- Upload them on the programme(s) website in .PDF file format (or other requested format).
- Keep the originals of your application documents: you will need them if you get accepted.
- Have someone to look over it once more!
- Submit your application with all required documents.

**Good luck!!!**

The EM-ACE Team

# NOTES