

WRITING RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Writing letters of recommendation is a balancing act: you want to share important and insightful information about the student, but you also want to keep your points meaningful and concise. You want to be honest, but you also want even your most challenging student to shine. You also need to manage your time with the volume of letters you've been asked to write. Use these tips and template to write a great letter of recommendation.

Ask the student to do some of the work.

Yes, you'll be writing the letter. And yes, you'll be including your own insights about the student's abilities as they relate to your class. But it's appropriate (and wise!) to ask the student to help you prepare by giving you an updated resume, a couple of statements about the things she remembers about or learned in your class(es), and a list of the colleges/scholarships to which she is applying.

Begin with a brief introduction.

Identify the student by his full name and your relationship to him, including the name(s) of any courses you taught him. Simple things like this help the college or scholarship staff to quickly match your letter to the student's application. Anything you can do to make that easier is good for the student!

Be specific.

Your role is to provide a portrait of the student that isn't available in the rest of the application, so don't worry about including grades or test scores. Rather, share brief anecdotes about a specific moment of learning or a story about a time when the student struggled and how she persevered. Don't be afraid to show the student's challenges; just be sure to also show her strengths!

Be supportive.

While you should be honest about a student's challenges, it's also important to be supportive of his application. If you cannot honestly recommend a student for admission or a scholarship, consider encouraging him to request that another teacher write the letter for him.

Proofread.

Letters don't have to be perfect, but a poorly written or unedited letter can reflect as much on the student as it can on you. Watch out, especially, for things like college/scholarship names, accurate student names (and spellings!), and correct pronouns.

Reduce, reuse, recycle.

Use a template that can be used for multiple applications. You may need to do some editing, but wherever possible, reduce your workload by reusing the letter. There may be times when it is appropriate to use portions of a letter for more than one student. If you do this, be especially diligent that all names and pronouns are correct. Be aware, also, that many admissions officers read applications by school group, and they will notice if they come across the same letter in more than one application.

RECOMMENDATION LETTER TEMPLATE

Use this template as a guide by following a similar format on your school's letterhead. Note that using headings and bullet points are acceptable, and often preferred.

COUNSELOR/TEACHER RECOMMENDATION LETTER

For Student Name (DOB: XX/XX/XXXX)

Distinctive Qualities

Provide a brief narrative about the student's qualities. Include any special circumstances about the student's high school experience that will help the application reader.

Academic History

Counselors: Share evidence reflective of the student's academic history. Are there trends, holes, or other items of note on the transcript that should be addressed? How well does the student's course selection reflect their abilities? Provide any school context necessary to understand student's choices – but only if this is not included in the school profile!

Teachers: Share evidence of the student's classroom engagement, reactions to setbacks or challenges, and any highlights that set the student apart from classmates.

-
-

Areas of Impact

Counselors: Share evidence of a student's impact on the school community, including any highlights.

Teachers: Share evidence of a student's impact in the classroom and any particular interest or talent in the subject matter.

-
-

Student Self-Reflection or Summary

Counselors: You may want to ask the student/peers/family members to describe herself/friend/child to round out your commentary. Use this space to share and confirm that assessment with any additional evidence you have. State your level of support for the student's application.

Teachers: share final thoughts. State your level of support for the student's application.

Counselor/Teacher Name, Title, Contact Information