

— WRITING RECOMMENDATION LETTERS —

There's an art to writing a letter of recommendation for college admission or a scholarship. You want to be sure to share the necessary, important, and insightful information about the student, but you don't want to go overboard (admissions staff and scholarship providers are reading so many that you want to keep your points meaningful and concise). You want to be honest, but you want even your most challenging student to shine. You need to balance your time with the sheer volume of letters you've been requested to write. Here's a handy list of tips for the next time you're asked to provide a letter of recommendation.

- 1 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 providing you with an updated resume, a couple of statements about the things they most remember about your class(es) – particularly as they relate to the student's learning, and a list of the colleges/scholarships to which she is applying.
- 2 Begin with a Brief Introduction.** Identify the student by his full name in the first paragraph 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, and anything you can do to make that easier is good for the student!
- 3 Be Specific.** Your role is to provide the reader with a portrait of the student that isn't available in the rest of the application, so brief anecdotes about a specific moment of learning are great. Don't worry about including grades or test scores – those are available in other parts of the application. Do consider sharing a story about a time when the student struggled and how she persevered. Brilliant students are wonderful to have on campus, but college professors also love students who aren't afraid of hard work. Don't be afraid to show the student's challenges; just be sure to also show her strengths!
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.** Write a letter for each student that can be used for multiple applications. Some applications might require that you answer a specific question, so 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 about making sure 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 from the same teacher in more than one application.



— RECOMMENDATION LETTER TEMPLATE —

Use this template as a guide for recommendation letters by following a similar format on your school's letterhead.

COUNSELOR/TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

For Student's 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 make a good admissions decision.

ACADEMIC HISTORY

COUNSELORS should provide **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** should offer **evidence** of the student's classroom engagement, reactions to setbacks or challenges, and any highlights that set the student apart from classmates.

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AREAS OF IMPACT

COUNSELORS provide evidence of student's impact on the school community, including any highlights. **TEACHERS** provide evidence of a student's impact in the classroom and any particular interest or talent in the subject matter.

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STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION/SUMMARY

COUNSELORS may want to ask students/peers/family members to describe themselves/friends/child to round out your commentary. Use this space to share and confirm that assessment with any additional evidence you have. **TEACHERS** provide final thoughts. **BOTH** state level of support for student's application.

Counselor/Teacher Name, Title, and Contact Information

