

Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Recommendation

1. Consider your relationship with the applicant.

- How long have you known this person?
- How well do you know this person?
- Can you give specific examples of times this person has demonstrated the qualities, skills, and behaviors being evaluated?
- Do you have the time to write the letter well?

2. Decide whether or not to write the letter.

- Is your recommendation going to enhance this person's overall application?
- Can you be candid with the person? -Tell him or her which criteria you feel comfortable addressing and which you cannot (if any).
- If you do not agree to write the letter, explain why and consider helping the person brainstorm other possible letter writers.
- If you do not have time to write a quality letter, don't do it! A sub par letter can hurt the student more than help.

3. Criteria for the Letter

- Some applications will provide criteria on which the candidate will be evaluated and that should be included in the letter.
- If no criteria are provided, consider the person's academic performance, transferable skills, motivation, and personal characteristics as related to the program/profession to which he or she is applying.

4. Gathering Information

- Request a résumé or data sheet, unofficial transcript, personal statement, and an interview (if time allows) with the person for whom you are writing the letter.
- Ask for specific examples of times the candidate has demonstrated various skills and attributes or think of times you have observed the candidate demonstrating these characteristics.
- More information is better than not enough. You can always edit later.

5. Tips for Writing the Letter

- If no guidelines are provided, limit the length to 1-2 typed pages, 10-12pt. font.
- Always use departmental letterhead.
- Limit the use of generic adjectives (very, really, great, wonderful) and passive verbs (is, does, etc.).
- CHECK YOUR GRAMMAR. You don't want your poor grammar to reflect badly on the person you are recommending.
- Make sure you have contact information for the person readily available should you have questions or need to clarify information.
- Sign the letter! Your original signature needs to be there. Also, add your position title below your name.