Letters of Recommendation

In shedding light on a student’s personal qualities, character, intellect, and motivation, letters of recommendation breathe life into an application and illustrate what can’t be captured in grades and scores: what it might be like to have a young person on the college’s campus and its classrooms. – *Robin Mamlet, Former Dean of Admission at Stanford, Swarthmore, and Sarah Lawrence*

**The Role of the Teacher Recommendation**

* Provides insight into students’ intellectualism and how they differentiate themselves from others within a classroom environment
* Provides an outside assessment and a personal perspective

**The colleges would like to know (especially via illustrative stories and anecdotes):**

* If a student has demonstrated a willingness to take intellectual risks
* If the student has any notable or unusual competencies, talent, or leadership abilities
* What motivates this person? What excites him/her?
* How the applicant interacts with teachers? With peers?
* Details about a student’s intellectual energy and potential, work habits, writing ability, attitude and approach to learning, motivation and drive, contributions to the academic environment, etc.
* If they are they eager and enthusiastic learners
* If and how they elevate the level of classroom discourse through their contributions
* If they are original thinkers who ask interesting questions.
* If they have they grown throughout the time you have taught them
* How the applicant responded when he/she experienced disappointment or failure. Did they demonstrate resilience?
* For high achieving kids, are they truly brilliant? Do they have a growth mindset? Are they excited about learning?

**Please Do:**

* Write like a human being talking to another human being. A casual tone is fine, and often preferred!
* Make your students distinctive from one another
* Offer your personal reflections
* Focus on what you know or have experienced
* Tell the college you love the student (if you love them!)
* Be anecdotal
* Be honest
* Stress quality over quantity
* Say no to requests, judiciously

**Please Do Not:**

* Narrate your syllabus
* List your own accomplishments
* List grades received or other courses taken
* List activities where you have no personal insight to add
* Fill a page just to fill a page
* Feel like you should/need to provide a full picture of the student that comments on things you have not directly observed (activities, family, etc)
* Copy/paste your letters

**Please keep in mind:**

* Colleges are only looking for glowing superlatives if they are backed up with examples and provide perspective
* Powerful words lose strength without context
* Words like fine, good, solid, conscientious, polite, diligent, quiet, consistent, earnest, reliable, meticulous, etc. are *fine* adjectives that communicate *reliable* qualities, but will not make students stand out in a competitive applicant pool (especially at highly selective colleges where the admit rate is 1 in 10)
* The recommendation is a letter of advocacy; not a critique
* Your letter is one piece of evidence among many that work together to provide a full picture of the student. If you have questions or concerns about how to approach something, please connect with that student’s counselor.

**Other Notes**

* Please use the full name of the student (as it reads in PowerSchool) at the top of the letter (see template)
* There is no need to use greetings and salutations in the letter. Simply begin your recommendation below the name of the student.
* It’s fine to refer to the student by his/her preferred first name (even if it’s not the student’s legal name)
* It works best if you save your letter as a PDF and upload it in that format.

**Please write in a way that makes you feel comfortable and share the wonderful things our students are doing.** It is the hope of the Counseling Department that you are able find the joy in recommending these students whom you have gotten to know so well over the course of the year(s). We believe this is an important element of the educational process.