

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are used to gather additional information about a candidate for employment, graduate study or other opportunity. It should give an overall picture of the candidate's:

- personal characteristics
- performance
- experience
- strengths
- capabilities
- professional promise

Preferably, the person writing the letter of recommendation has been in a working or academic relationship with the applicant. It is recommended that the student provide you with a copy of their resume, along with the job description they are applying for. The letter should be about one page in length and generally consist of three parts: opening, body, and closing.

Two questions to ask yourself **BEFORE** accepting a request to write a letter of recommendation

1. Can you speak positive about this individual? If you find yourself making up half truths, or having trouble finding positives, then you need to politely decline serving as a reference, or writing a reference letter. To avoid hurting feelings, simply state you feel you are not familiar enough with their background or work ethic to provide the best recommendation.

2. Can you speak for the applicant on the position they are applying for? If an individual asks you to be a reference, or to provide a reference letter and you do not feel you can provide a well rounded background reference, then you may want to consider either politely declining, or setting up an appointment with that individual to get to know them, and the position they are seeking more.

Opening

The writer should explain the relationship between himself/herself and the candidate as well as why the letter is being written.

For example: *Bill Jones completed his student teaching under my supervision. I am pleased to be able to provide a letter recommending him for a position as a teacher.*

The writer may want to describe the type of experience, length, and time period during which he/she worked with the candidate. The writer may also wish to describe any special assignments or responsibilities that the candidate completed.

Body

The body of the recommendation should provide specific information about the candidate. Information may include:

1. Personal characteristics such as poise, confidence, dependability, patience, creativity, etc.
2. Teaching abilities such as knowledge of the subject area, problem solving abilities, ability to manage students, ability to work with colleagues and parents, curriculum development, etc.
3. Specific areas of strength or special experiences. The candidate may have some exceptional strengths such as a very high energy level or excellent communication skills.

Closing

The closing of the letter should briefly summarize previous points and clearly state that you recommend the candidate for the position, graduate program or opportunity they are seeking.

The recommendation letter should be written in language that is straightforward and to the point. Avoid using jargon or language that is too general or effusive.

See Page Two for a Sample Recommendation Letter

Legality Issues to keep in mind

- State in the reference letter, “This information is confidential, should be treated as such, and is provided at the request of [name of student or applicant], who has asked me to serve as a reference.” Statements such as this give justification for the communication and leave no doubt that the information was not given to hurt a person’s reputation.
- Do not include information that might indicate the individual’s race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, citizenship status, sex (unless by the individual’s name it is obvious), or marital status.
- Before disclosing educational information covered by FERPA (e.g. student's transcripts, GPA, grades, social security number, etc.), you must obtain the written consent of the student. Failure to obtain such consent may constitute a violation of FERPA.

National Association for Colleges and Employers (2008) *Suggested Guidelines for Writing References*. Retrieved from <http://www.nacweb.org/public/reference1.htm>

Sample of Recommendation Letter:

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I am writing on behalf of Tom Smith, and served as his cooperating teacher during his student teaching assignment the Spring 20XX semester. Tom completed sixteen weeks of student teaching in seventh grade social studies under my supervision. I am pleased to be able to write a letter of recommendation for Tom.

During Tom's student teaching experience, he was highly motivated to learn as much as he could and perform to his best capacities. He frequently put in long hours to develop lesson plans and monitor student progress. He asked for feedback on a daily basis and accepted constructive criticism with maturity. He understood his limitations as an inexperienced teacher and observed experienced teachers closely in order to improve his own teaching abilities.

Tom has several strengths but his main strength, from my observations, is his ability to motivate students. He always seemed sincerely interested in their progress and presented new material in a way that captured their attention. For example, he had a group of students map out a "road-trip" across the United States. The students had to plan the trip to include a given number of state and national parks, major cities, and historic battle sites. The students really dived into the project. Tom consistently displayed this type of creativity in planning lessons and motivating students. He soon learned that the best way to manage a classroom is to keep students on-task with projects that were both interesting and challenging. He also did a good job of recognizing when a student needed special assistance or attention.

In summary, Tom displayed the qualities that make a teacher successful. He is dependable, motivated, and is in tune with the needs of his students. He works well with colleagues and administration and is able to learn from those around him. I highly recommend him for a teaching position.

Sincerely,

Mr. Faculty