

# Guide to Strong Letters of Recommendation

## Whom to Ask

It's your job to find people to write letters of recommendation for you. Follow these steps to start the process:

- Read each of your college applications carefully. Schools often ask for letters of recommendation from an academic teacher — sometimes in a specific subject — or a school counselor or both.
- Ask a counselor, teachers and your family who they think would make good references.
- Choose one of your teachers from junior year or a current teacher who has known you for a while. Colleges want a current perspective on you, so a teacher from several years ago isn't the best choice.
- Consider asking a teacher who also knows you outside the classroom. For example, a teacher who directed you in a play or advised your debate club can make a great reference.
- Consider other adults — such as an employer, a coach or an adviser from an activity outside of school — who have a good understanding of you and your strengths.
- Perhaps most important, pick someone who will be enthusiastic about writing the letter for you.
- If you're unsure about asking someone in particular, politely ask if he or she feels comfortable recommending you. That's a good way to avoid weak letters.

## How to Get the Best Recommendations

Some teachers write many recommendation letters each year. Even if they know you well, it's a good idea to take some time to speak with them. Make it easy for them to give positive, detailed information about your achievements and your potential by refreshing their memory.

Here's how:

- Talk to them about your class participation.
- Remind them of specific work or projects you're proud of.
- Tell them what you learned in class.
- Mention any challenges you overcame.
- Give them the information they need to provide specific examples of your work.
- If you need a recommendation letter from a counselor or other school official, follow these guidelines:
  - Make an appointment ahead of time.
  - Talk about your accomplishments, hobbies and plans for college and the future.
- If you need to discuss part of your transcript — low grades during your sophomore year, for example — do so. Explain why you had difficulty and discuss how you've changed and improved since then.

Whether approaching teachers, a counselor or another reference, you may want to provide them with a resume that briefly outlines your activities, both in and outside the classroom, as well as our goals.

## Final Tips

- Waive your right to view recommendation letters on your application forms. Admission officers will trust them more if you haven't seen them.
- Make sure your references know the deadlines for each college and/or scholarship application.
- Follow up with your references a week or so before recommendations are due to make sure your letters have been completed.
- Once you've been notified which colleges have accepted you or which scholarships you have received, write thank-you notes. Tell your references and let them know how much you appreciate their support.

# RECOMMENDATION LETTER CHECKLIST

## TIMELINE

- |    |                                                                               |                          |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Ask letter writer for recommendation                                          | 2 weeks before deadline  |
| 2. | Give letter writer fact sheet                                                 | 2 weeks before deadline  |
| 3. | Give letter writer a friendly reminder of due date                            | 1 week before deadline   |
| 4. | Follow up with letter writer to make sure there are no problems or questions. | 3 days before deadline   |
| 5. | <b>Send letter writer a Thank You Note</b>                                    | 1-2 weeks after deadline |

This is very important – This person just did you a huge favor and you need to acknowledge that!!!

- Fill out a fact sheet for EACH recommendation letter you request. The best thing to do would be to fill ONE out completely, except for the name of the scholarship or college, deadline, address, etc. Make copies of the original as many times as you need to, then all you have to do is to fill out the top part for each different letter.
- The Recommendation Letter Fact Sheet needs to be filled out carefully and accurately.

Sources:

**Guidance Department at LaVille Jr. Senior High School:**

<http://www.unorth.k12.in.us/cms/lib07/IN01906390/Centricity/Domain/158/Senior%20Recommendation%20Letter%20pdf.pdf>

**The College Board:**

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/your-high-school-record/how-to-get-a-great-letter-of-recommendation>

## RECOMMENDATION LETTER FACT SHEET

Student Name: (official name used on application) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of scholarship or college: \_\_\_\_\_

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATION: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person receiving the letter: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and address of organization receiving the letter:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of letter (check one):       College Admission       Scholarship

Focus of letter? (Academic skills, leadership skills, community service, athletics, other): \_\_\_\_\_

Schools or Scholarships for which are applying in order of preference)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of INTEREST or intended MAJOR (in order of preference)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

### SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Classes currently taking:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Sports (include years of participation):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Clubs (include years of participation):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What co-curricular or extracurricular activity has been the most meaningful to you and why?

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Honors and Awards:

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Leadership Positions held:

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Academic Accomplishments:

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#### COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Church / Civic Organizations:

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Community Service Performed/ Volunteer Activities:

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Work Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

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Personal Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### FIVE ADJECTIVES THAT BEST DESCRIBE YOU:

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Would you like the letter writer to address a particular part or aspect of your life? If, yes, what?

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