

Writing Effective Teacher Letters of Recommendation:

The role of the teacher recommendation:

Teacher recommendations should be honest appraisals of a student's academic performance and intellectual promise. They are intended primarily to convey the teacher's classroom experience with the student — to give colleges an idea of how the student is likely to perform academically. These recommendations serve a different function than the counselor recommendation, which is meant to provide a broader view of the student.

Why are Recommendation Letters Important?

The majority of admissions officers at four-year colleges, especially private schools, emphasize that their process is *holistic*. They seek to gain a sense of the student as a "whole person," rather than focusing on pieces of who she is based solely on grades and test scores. Since they rarely meet the student in person, the recommendation letters, along with the student's own personal essay, **play a huge role in illuminating her intellectual and personal qualities.**

That's why recommendation letters from teachers, especially those who know their students well, carry a great deal of weight in applications. A letter that expresses a strong vote of support, as well as **highlights a student's impressive academic and personal strengths**, can have a powerful effect on that student's chances of admission.

Useful Tips:

- Highlight both the academic *and* personal traits of the student to portray them as a real, personable human being
- Maintain a positive and enthusiastic tone throughout the letter
- Don't go overboard, but have **examples to back up your assessments**. Specific examples and stories are key for backing up the assessment. Plus, they make a letter more interesting and memorable. Rather than just another engineering applicant, Stacy is the student who researched sound-absorption to spare her parents from hours of guitar scales.
- Discuss the students' **personal strengths**, along with their academic strengths. Present the holistic view that admissions officers are looking for, along with their strong vote of confidence in the students' future success.
- Provide the reader with the information and impressions they cannot glean from the rest of the application. Support your conclusions with facts and anecdotes whenever possible.
- Many of our students apply to **the same schools** with the **same admissions representative** reading their applications and letters. It's important to make each student's letter **unique**.
- Please pay special attention to the opening and closing of your evaluation. Remember, many colleges are reading over 20,000 applications, and they appreciate strong statements that they'll remember as they evaluate each candidate. With that said, please write in a way that makes you feel comfortable and do not shy away from giving your

honest impressions. They are only looking for glowing superlatives if they are backed up with examples and give them context - what is behind a student's achievements. Above all else, make sure to go beyond a student's grades and academic performance. They can get this information from other parts of the application.

- If you feel that you don't know a student well enough or don't feel comfortable recommending them for some other reason, just politely decline the request. Tell these students to ask a teacher who may know them better.
- Teacher letters should be kept to one, single-spaced page. If your letter is too short, you risk appearing less than impressed with the applicant; if it is too long, you risk seeming insincere or boring. Maintain a positive and enthusiastic tone throughout the letter.
- Spelling and grammar count. **Remember to proofread!** These are your professional words.
- **Paragraph one** should introduce the student using their full name the first time. It should frame the relationship you have with the student.
- **Paragraphs two-three** should focus on the student's character and academic performance in your classroom. You can highlight some of their extracurriculars as they relate to the student's character/performance. For example: I'm not surprised that Sally is the captain of the soccer team as other students in class turn to her for her leadership.... Give specific examples of HOW the student achieved. Did they take on challenges, what was their approach, did they overcome obstacles to reach their goals? If possible, give strengths that are relevant to the department for which the student is applying.
- **Paragraph four** should conclude with a direct and sincere recommendation, including the student's full name again and how you can be contacted.

Resources:

<https://resumegenius.com/letter-of-recommendation/student-and-teacher-samples>

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/4-amazing-recommendation-letter-samples>

<https://mitadmissions.org/apply/parents-educators/writingrecs/>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/tips-for-writing-college-recommendation-letter/>

<https://counselors.collegeboard.org/pdf/college-advising-essentials-booklet-contents-web.pdf>

<https://professionals.collegeboard.org/guidance/applications/teacher-tips>