



Writing Letters of Recommendation Workshop





Recommendations meeting with the student



- Set a time to meet with the student
- Take notes
- Outline your expectations (see handout)
- Set a timeline. Ask for a list of deadlines. Excel spread sheets are really helpful if you are writing several for the same student.
- Ask for reminders and for outcomes



Recommendations materials needed



- Annotated Resume
- Unofficial Transcript
- Graded Papers
- Paragraph descriptions of activities
- Draft of proposal or personal statement
- Reference guidance from award or institution



Recommendations when to say no



- You do not know the student well. This is especially important if the request is for a nationally competitive award.
- You have not worked with the student in a very long time.
- The student does not provide you with sufficient information or asks at the last minute. (See Chuck King handout.)
- You have questions about the student's work or integrity.
- You simply do not have time.



Recommendations when a student should say no



- Students should say no when faculty members ask them to draft letters for their signature or for revision.

WHY?

- Weak letters
- Inappropriate tone
- Awkward feelings for the student
- May make fraudulent claims
- Not appreciated by foundations
- Violates the NAFA code of ethics



Recommendations the audience



- Understand the purpose of the letter
- Know the audience
- Adjust the letter for different awards. Each will provide guidance.
- Double-check key words like name of award, program, or institution
- Connect with the student about what you should emphasize
- Provide examples for general statements.



Recommendations getting started



- Use letterhead
- Include the address if possible even on electronic submissions
- Avoid *Dear Sir* (or *Dear Sir or Madame*)
- Avoid *To Whom it May Concern* unless it is a generic letter given to the student for future use
- Use Dear Admissions or ____Scholarship Selection Committee
- Include a real signature if possible, an electronic one if not. Do not use a script font. Always check to make sure you make the right changes for the specific award.
- Aim for at least a full page.



Recommendations the structure of the letter



- Context of your interactions with the student
- How the student compares to others (if positive)
- Description of the student's academic work/research. Why you are writing an enthusiastic letter. Details please.
- Penultimate paragraph: Any boilerplate about the lab, your work, the institution and why that is important in connection with the student
- Conclusion. Summing up student's strength. Statement of support.



Recommendations transferable skills



- ability to think critically
- research skills
- creativity
- communication skills
- leadership experience
- teamwork abilities
- ability to cope with obstacles
- flexibility



Recommendations language that can hurt



- *I imagine this student would be a good candidate for the Rhodes.*
- *The student certainly has a reputation on our campus.*
- *Given where this student started, she is doing exceptionally well.*
- *Of the ten students in my lab, he is in the top half.*
- *I don't know this student very well but.....*
- *I am very good friend of this student's mother.....*
- *I have known this student since she was a child.....*
- *She is very shy, but she copes with it.*
- *He is certainly aware of his limitations.*



Recommendations coded language



Good	good, solid, competent	strongly, without reservation	on par with, in the top 25%
Better	strong	happily, energetically, with confidence	compares favorably with, in the top 10%
Best	outstanding excellent terrific	wholeheartedly, enthusiastically	in an elite group, in the top 2%



Recommendations be specific



- *Compare with peers.*
- *Provide quantitative measures if possible—publications, presentations, GPA, scholarships, awards, other recognition*
- *Discuss the work you know first hand.*
- *Describe activities and leadership as well, but discuss these with the students. Avoid just lifting them off a resume*
- *Discuss teamwork abilities if you have evidence. Provide anecdotal information.*



Recommendations—Your students Thank You



Questions?