

Writing a Recommendation Letter for a Student

Once you have decided to write a recommendation letter for a student, you have many decisions to make about what to emphasize, how to structure the letter, and how much detail to include. The following may tips may be useful, particularly if you're new to writing recommendation letters for students.

Tip 1: Identify the purpose of the letter (i.e., on whose behalf you're writing and to/for what the student is applying). The first paragraph can be short. Begin by offering an overall opinion of the student, perhaps one that highlights the **level** of your enthusiasm or support (e.g., "...offer my highest recommendation..." or "...with very strong recommendation..."). Include a very short statement of your relationship with the student, including the length of time you've known her/him and in what capacity.

Tip 2: The length and structure of a letter generally depends on its purpose; a recommendation for graduate school admission may be more than a page long, whereas a work-related recommendation generally will be one page or less. You might structure your letter so that you have a short paragraph on in-class performance, then one on written work, then one on out-of-classroom activities. Or you might structure it so that you focus on specific qualities you have observed in the student (e.g., leadership, intellectual capacity, resilience), followed by a paragraph on specific examples from inside or outside the classroom that demonstrate those qualities.

Tip 3: Provide as many concrete details as possible. Effective recommendation letters generally tell a story about a person, and drawing on examples that can represent several points you want to make can be quite powerful. The more vivid your letter, the less clichéd it will sound.

Tip 4: Often, readers want to understand both a student's strengths and areas for potential growth. Without focusing on the negative, summarize any growth you observed in the student (e.g., "At the beginning of the semester, she seemed less invested; however, as she grew more confident, she grew more assertive...").

Resources

Harris, S. (n.d.). Writing Letters of Recommendation: A Form to Help Students Help You, So You Can Help Them. <http://paperzz.com/doc/352207/writing-letters-of-recommendation---saint-louis-university>

Tips on Writing Recommendation Letters. Ithaca College. <http://www.ithaca.edu/sacl/careers/faculty/tips/>

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your work, contact the Reinert Center at ctl@slu.edu.