



Helpful Hints for Writing a Recommendation

In today's competitive market, graduate school and job applicants are being forced to use every available tool to be successful. Writing a letter of recommendation is not a simple task and must be taken seriously, because it could mean the difference between being accepted, hired, or rejected. The candidate has little control over letters of recommendation, so we offer the following only as suggestions on how to be an effective evaluator. Please return the recommendation promptly, because a candidate's acceptance may depend on the punctuality of the recommendation.

- ✂ Give honest and factual information. When approached to write a recommendation, ask yourself if you honestly know the person's qualities. If you have not had much contact with the person you cannot give an accurate description. It would be better to decline to write a recommendation than to write a vague or irrelevant one.
- ✂ Have the person give you a list of accomplishments, organizations that s/he belongs to, or any other relevant information. It might surprise you to see how much that person has done outside of your contact with them. This can also help you get a more accurate picture of the individual. Having the person give you copy of his/her resume is an easy way to have this information at hand.
- ✂ Concentrate on several different aspects of the person. Specifically identify his/her skills, attitudes, and growth, as well as his/her contributions to and performance within your organization. It is extremely important to include examples where possible. It is one thing to state that someone had some good ideas and another to say, "John integrated reading and writing into a language experience program with an emphasis on comprehension." Also, if you do make negative comments, back them up with facts.
- ✂ The appearance of a letter is a reflection on both you and the candidate and it can also determine whether it will be read or not. **PLEASE TYPE YOUR RECOMMENDATION NEATLY!**
- ✂ If you are using a recommendation form, please do not restrict your reference to the graph. Written comments should complement and elaborate on this chart and not conflict with it. Written comments on the form or on an additional page should not leave any questions in the mind of the reader.
- ✂ Don't reference characteristics that can be the basis of discrimination, such as race, color, nationality, gender, religion, age, appearance, disability, marital or parental status, or political point of view!
- ✂ The following list of attributes (compiled by the National Association of Colleges and Employers) is often listed by employers as tools on which to base eventual selection. So, these are excellent points to address:
ability to communicate, intelligence, self-confidence, willingness to accept responsibility, initiative, leadership, energy level, imagination, flexibility, interpersonal skills, self-knowledge, ability to handle conflict, goal achievement, competitiveness, appropriate vocational skills, direction.