
Writing Letters of Recommendation

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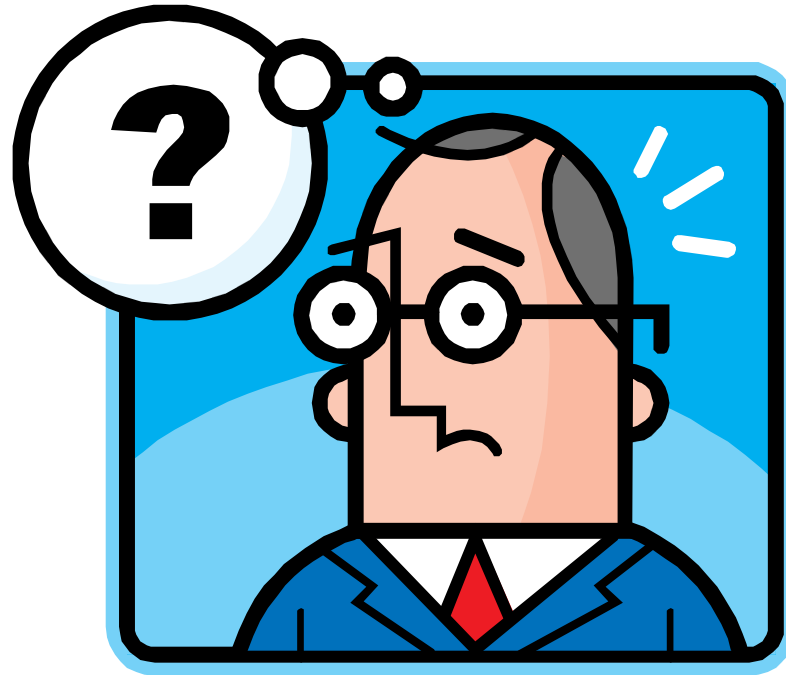
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Overview

- When do you agree to write a letter?
 - What should you ask for from the person requesting a letter?
 - Information about person requesting letter
 - Information about what you are writing the letter for
 - What should I include in the letter?
 - Topics
 - Format
 - Language
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When Should You Agree To Write a Letter?



If you agree to write, what next?

- What do you need to know about the person you write a letter for?
 - Personal knowledge!
 - How do you gather this information?
 - What do you need to know about the opportunity for which the individual is applying?
 - Don't make a mistake!
 - How do you gather this information?
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What goes into a letter of recommendation?

■ Basics:

- How and how long you have known applicant
- What skills does applicant have that are relevant to opportunity? Emphasize key points with examples.
- How is this person exceptional? Or what makes this person stand out?
- Be succinct (most letters of reference are no longer than three pages)
- Volunteer to receive follow-up/end strong

■ Other questions:

- What to do with weaknesses?
 - What do you say about yourself as the recommender?
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Helpful Concepts:

(Attributes)

- 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
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More Helpful Concepts:

(Intangible Qualities)

- empathy
 - a divergent, abstract thinking style
 - a high level of commitment
 - the ability to be a "self-starter"
 - a high energy level
 - the recognition that excellence is a journey, not a destination
 - the potential ability to lead
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Possible Format

Introduction:

- State the purpose: “I am writing to recommend...for...”
- How you know individual/how long

Body:

- Traits and specific examples that relate to opportunity

Closing:

- Specific recommendation and follow-up
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Language

- Standout adjectives:
 - superb, outstanding, remarkable, topnotch
 - Other positive adjectives:
 - honest, articulate, effective, sophisticated, intelligent, observant, significant, expressive, creative, efficient, cooperative, imaginative, dependable, reliable, mature, innovative
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Be careful about using:

- Wishy-washy words:
 - nice, good, fair, fairly, adequate, reasonable, decent, and satisfactory
 - Gender stereotypical words:
 - Affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing, agreeable, tactful, interpersonal, warm, caring, tactful

(See Madera, Hebl, and Martin, *Gender and Letters of Recommendation for Academia*, 94 J. of Applied Psychology 1591 (2009))
 - References to race, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender, family status
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