Writing Letters of Recommendation

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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
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?
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?
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
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
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
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
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


- References to race, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender, family status