

# RECOMMENDATIONS

How to Write Successful Recommendations

## How to Write Successful Recommendations

It's the time of year when undergrads will ask for letters of recommendation. Here's how to write letters that will make a difference.

### *1. Specificity matters:*

The more information about the student you can offer, the better. Make sure that the student provides you with detailed information about papers, grades, outside activities, relevant experiences, and awards.

### *2. Be wary of exaggerated praise:*

Credibility counts. Readers discount letters that are over the top. Undue praise is regarded as insincere. Speak in terms of specific accomplishments and skills.

### *3. Don't be excessively brief:*

One way that readers evaluate recommendations is by the level of detail.

### *4. Touch all the bases:*

Academic performance is central, but don't ignore the student's initiative, reliability, ability to work with others, and ability to work independently.

### **The "Formula":**

*1. Say that it is a pleasure to write on the student's behalf and why.*

*2. Describe your relationship with the student.* How did you meet the student? How long have you known the student? Is your relationship exclusively professional?

*3. Say something about the course:* how demanding it is, the caliber of the students, the number of assignments, etc.

*4. Describe yourself and your qualifications to evaluate the student.*

5. In successive paragraphs, describe the student's:

*a. intellectual characteristics*

*b. command of the subject matter*

*c. ability to communicate orally and in writing*

*d. industry and self-discipline*

*e. maturity (including the ability to accept constructive criticism)*

*f. interpersonal skills*

*g. achievements and extra-curricular activities*

*h. potential*

**6. Conclude with an overall assessment**, one which doesn't simply repeat what you said earlier. Also, state that you draw these conclusions without qualification, and that if there are any questions, you'd be happy to respond.