



ACADEMIC LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION & GUIDE

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1. Overview

The modern job market is competitive, and applicants must work hard to stand out from an ever-growing pool of potential employees. Letters of recommendation play an essential role in this process, and can push the decision on a candidate from a maybe to a yes. A strong letter goes beyond a resume's flat descriptions and adds an evaluative element to what is otherwise just a list of tasks performed.

Unfortunately, writing personal letters of recommendation takes time and consideration; it's difficult to know where to start or what to include. The enclosed sample will provide structure for a personalized letter, eliminating some of the tedious and time-consuming drafting that would otherwise be required. You can support a student or former student quickly and effectively, without taking too much time to recreate a standardized document.

With a little consideration and some personal additions, the enclosed letter can provide a significant boost to those who may need it in their job search. It will afford those individuals concrete and credible evidence of their abilities and past accomplishments, and may help them get them into the school of their dreams.

2. Dos & Don'ts Checklist

- ☐ Before writing a letter of recommendation, consider your acquaintance with the person requesting it. Are you familiar with their work? Do you have a favorable impression of their experience and capacity? Can you honestly recommend them? If the answer to any of these questions is no, have a candid discussion with the candidate and try to resolve your concerns. If you are unable to do so, suggest that there may others better suited to serve as the applicant's advocate.
- ☐ Academic letters of recommendation are generally provided by individuals who have witnessed a student's participation in both class and extracurricular activities, and provide organized and frank discussions of an applicant's abilities and achievements. Think of these as written versions of an interview: what would you say to the face of a school administrator? What would you want to convey?
- ☐ Although it seems self-aggrandizing, it's important to emphasize your own credentials when drafting an academic letter of recommendation. The more "important" you seem, the more your opinion will matter to the prospective institution.
- ☐ Show the reader you've known the candidate for long enough to have formed an educated and cogent opinion. Communicate your confidence in and support of the applicant and try to provide some insight into his or her personal attributes.

- ☐ Though it is important for you to customize the document to fit your needs, the standard structure of a letter of recommendation is (and should remain) as follows:
 - The author's credentials provided in the letterhead, signature block, and/or opening paragraph.
 - The relationship between the author and the candidate described in the opening paragraph.
 - The author's opinion of the candidate introduced in the first paragraph and reiterated in the closing.
 - The candidate's attributes discussed in two or three concise paragraphs, and one or two discrete personality traits addressed in each such paragraph.
- ☐ If you are struggling to make the letter more personal, ask the candidate for additional information about him or herself (e.g., transcripts, writing samples or a short narrative).
- ☐ Before agreeing to write a letter, ask about any pending submission deadlines. If you can't complete the letter within the available time frame, inform the candidate immediately so he or she can seek out alternatives.
- ☐ Be thoughtful about revising the enclosed letter. A smart reviewer knows to read between the lines of a letter of recommendation, and will consider what your letter does *not* say. Phrasing can reveal much about an author's true knowledge and feelings.
- ☐ The enclosed form begins with the phrase: "It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend...." If you are not well acquainted with a candidate, consider an introduction more appropriate to your relationship. For example: "This serves as a letter of reference for...."

3. Academic Letter of Recommendation Instructions

- An academic letter of recommendation should be between one and two pages.
- The attached document is a sample. Although it can be used with minimal editing, it's a good idea to include more personal details as well. Try to incorporate anecdotes or stories of the person's achievements, or conversations you shared with the candidate – any information that might provide a more nuanced understanding of the applicant.
- The enclosed document is addressed "To Whom It May Concern." Ask the applicant for a more specific recipient. A general address makes both you and the candidate look unprofessional and unprepared.
- The subject of the enclosed letter of recommendation is referred to as CANDIDATE throughout the document. The capital letters are used to make instances of that word easier to locate. Review the document and replace the word CANDIDATE with the applicant's name. Remember to remove all prompts as well (e.g., [title]).
- The enclosed letter is gender neutral. Revise any areas marked [his/her], [he/she], or [him/her] with the pronoun appropriate to the candidate.

- **Proofread the letter carefully.** The letter's form is itself a recommendation: sincerity and authority can be undermined by a misspelled word or an unchanged CANDIDATE.
- Consider including your contact information below your signature. This will allow the interviewer to get in touch with any follow-up questions and will solidify in his or her mind your enthusiasm for the candidate. If you do not wish to provide this information, delete the last sentence of the closing paragraph.

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Form Sample

SAMPLE ACADEMIC LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Date:

[To Whom It May Concern][Dear _____]:

It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend CANDIDATE to your [school/institution]. In my capacity as _____ [title] at _____ [school], I have taught and worked with CANDIDATE for _____ [# of years] years. During [his/her] time here, CANDIDATE has proved [him/herself] a hard-working and responsible individual and I am delighted to provide this letter of recommendation on [his/her] behalf.

CANDIDATE possesses an exceptional blend of intellectual skill and social grace, and I believe [he/she] will contribute immensely to your [school/university]'s academics and community. [He/She] is an excellent student with a lively mind: students with curiosity levels and academic aptitude like that displayed by CANDIDATE are rare. I admire [his/her] genuine fascination with the subjects [he/she] studies, and [his/her] ability to approach each topic with vigor and initiative. For example, during a recent class project _____ [INSERT EXAMPLE]. This example is just one of many: time and time again, CANDIDATE demonstrates [his/her] leadership skills and [his/her] remarkable ability to manage conflict.

CANDIDATE is not only an immensely gifted and dedicated student but also an addition to the classroom as well. It is often difficult to find a student who is an individual and the group in discussion and who can offer serious criticism and perform