

Writing College Recommendations – Suggestions for Teachers

Do:

1. Require the student provide you with an addressed & stamped envelope.
2. Write only what you really know (i.e. academics, athletics, extra-curricular.)
3. Include personal anecdotes.
4. Set the student apart from other students.
5. Tell something that makes the student unique.
6. Express problems in a straightforward way.
7. Ask others, who know the student, their opinion (other teachers, coaches, club advisors.)
8. Consider whether the student matches the college.
9. Use school letterhead.
10. Keep a copy of the recommendation.

Don't

1. Agree to write a recommendation for someone you cannot recommend.
2. Write a boring recommendation.
3. Send off a recommendation with grammatical/spelling errors.
4. Try to "put one over" on the admissions office.
5. Agree to write a glowing recommendation for a student who asks one day before the deadline.

If you are looking for a structure, you may wish to include SOME of the following elements. **Don't think you must cover all of these items... you can't.**

➤ **First paragraph** – your course's content (about three sentences.)

Concept/framework of your course

Topics covered

Methods to cover content (i.e. discussion, lecture, independent study, self-pacing.)

Expectations for students.

Skills developed.

What you consider an outstanding performance.

Expectations concerning clarity of expression /research ability /oral facility /creative insights.

➤ **Second Paragraph** – the student's performance

SPECIFIC judgments about a student's ability to formulate hypotheses, gather relevant information, draw conclusions.

Student's ability to write and speak clearly.

Student's enjoyment of learning.

How student compares to others in class.

Student's strengths.

➤ **Third paragraph** – your perception of student's attitude toward learning

What is the student's interest/motivation/commitment/curiosity?

Does he/she seek extra help or work beyond the call of duty?

INCLUDE AN ANECDOTE.

➤ **Fourth Paragraph** – Character

EVIDENCE of overall personal character.

What kind of relationship do you have with the student?

What kind of relationship does the student have with his/her peers?

How does the student treat others in the class?

Have you seen evidence of leadership/character in other areas of school life?

Give a SPECIFIC ANECDOTE to support view.

➤ **Fifth paragraph** – Unique qualities.

What makes the student unique academically/socially/athletically/personally?

What, if anything, would give the student an "edge" in the admissions process?

Can you predict the student's impact on a college campus?

Still Stuck??

Think about... to what extent has this student reached or risked beyond the expectations of his/her peers.

Think about...	his/her intellectual stamina?	Willingness to find solutions?
	Intellectual energy?	Seriousness of purpose?
	Intellectual curiosity?	Learning style(s)?
	Intellectual integrity?	Critical and analytical thinking skills?

Think about...blending. Does the student "blend" athletics and academics? How?

Think about...his/her course selection because it reflects a set of values held by the student.

Think about...how this student compares with past students who've been successful at that particular college. If you know any specifics about that college that demonstrate a good match between student and school, share that information.

Think about...growth. Give the student credit for what he/she has become.

The Power in Word Choice

Words which imply a personal judgment are often INAPPROPRIATE:

Womanly	Nervous	Manly	Feeble	Pretty	Buxom	Strapping
Handsome	Winsome	Good-looking	Cute	Odious	Pixyish	Tense

Words which suggest any reference to race, sex, religion, appearance, politics are usually inappropriate.

Words which are nondescript DILUTE the effectiveness of a letter:

Nice	Likable	Pleasant	Satisfactory	Good	Competent	Civil	Very
Appropriate	Ordinary	Reasonable	Solid	Decent	Fairly	Meaningful	

Words which are powerful increase the effectiveness of a letter:

Edge	Brilliant	Imaginative	Acclaim	Poise	Mature	Survivor	Intelligent
Expressive	Reputation	Focus	Force	Assertive	Witty	Sophisticated	Prestige
Impact	Significant	Capacity	Innovative	Endearing	Charismatic	Urbane	

Words that add specifics

Mental qualities

Educated	Prudent	Erudite	Reasonable	Scholarly	Rational	Precocious	Wise	Shrewd
Astute	Subtle	Talented	Observant	Intellectual	Clever	Sensible	Capable	Inventive

Moral qualities

Idealistic	Exemplary	Decent	Trustworthy	Truthful	Respectable	Honorable	Straightforward
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Social qualities

Tactful	Sociable	Gracious	Polite	Sensitive	Cordial	Genial	Ebullient
Affable	Courteous	Cheerful	Amiable	Cooperative	Convivial	Amicable	

General personal qualities

Distinguished	Intrepid	Generous	Serious	Benevolent	Eloquent	Conscientious	Unaffected	Earnest
Imposing	Solemn	Humane	Wary	Gentle	Witty	Assiduous	Modest	Resolute
Munificent	Garrulous	Tolerant	Laconic	Ambitious	Candid	Punctual	Indifferent	Cautious
Sympathetic	Taciturn	Persistent	Natural	Efficient	Self-effacing	Determined	Impressive	Reserved
Industrious	Responsive	Scrupulous	Humble	Uncompromising	Nonchalant	Plucky	Magnanimous	Considerate
Resourceful	Reticent	Enthusiastic	Serene	Strong-willed	Influential	Discreet	Compassionate	Ingenuous
Zealous	Amenable	Self-reliant	Pensive	Self-starter	Charitable	Persuasive	Persevering	Unassuming
Confident	Imperturbable	Courageous	Admirable	Indomitable	Patient	Droll	Diligent	Philosophical