

# Tips for Letters of Recommendation

In order for a college to understand how a student is likely to perform academically, it relies on that student's high school teachers to provide recommendations on academic performance and potential. A strong teacher recommendation can bring a student's application to life for the admission committee and may be the decisive factor for some students.

## EFFECTIVE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

**Provide context.** The beginning of the letter explains how the person knows the student and is an opportunity for teachers to provide information on the courses taken with them.

**Are specific and storied.** The use of adjectives to describe the student should be accompanied with anecdotal detail.

*"David is an extremely kind and sensitive boy. He frequently works with other students who are falling behind and tutors students during his off-campus period."*

**Cite examples of academic performance.** Sharing descriptions of a student's piece of work strengthens statements about a student's academic abilities.

*"Although not a requirement for my class, Mary entered the science fair and her project demonstrated a high level of understanding of multiple complex varieties of plant and animal life. Her clear and succinct explanation impressed the judges."*

**Highlight other noteworthy characteristics.**

Examples of a student's personal qualities will provide insight about her or his additional attributes that will lead to success in college.

*"David always takes the initiative to look for answers before asking for help," and "Susan processes constructive criticism well; she is always willing to go the extra mile in order to take her work to the highest level of formal and conceptual refinement."*

**Note unusual situations or circumstances.** The letter can help explain a student's personal situation that contributed to class performance.

*"Chris provides emotional support to his mother through her battle with cancer without allowing the situation to undermine his own stability and accomplishments."*

## HELPFUL PREPARATION

**Requesting information:** Ask the student to provide a résumé or "brag sheet," reflections on the class, specific class accomplishments, and details of all deadlines for the forms.

**Talking to the student:** A conversation about the student's class experiences, colleges of interest, future plans, etc., can help frame the letter more clearly.