

# Tips for Letters of Recommendation

A strong letter of recommendation from a counselor can be—and often is—the differentiator that will get a student a closer look in the admission process. Both the students and the admission teams truly appreciate it.

## SUGGESTIONS

**Gather information:** Develop a way of obtaining information from your students through questionnaires, one-on-one meetings, or other techniques.

**Personalize:** Use the information to write an individualized and accurate letter. It should provide a picture of the student that cannot be found in any other part of the application.

**Contextualize:** Place the student in the context of their class or the school. Help the college understand your caseload and how well you know the student. Explain any unusual circumstances that may have affected the student's performance (within your rights given confidentiality constraints).

**Share key attributes:** Address attitude/character as well as academic ability. Relate observed characteristics such as leadership, passion, interests, and special talents.

**Provide examples:** Support your points with stories and details that highlight the student. Address growth if you have known the student over a significant period of time.

**Stay honest:** Be candid and comprehensive and include negatives if you are comfortable doing so.

**Contribute to campus:** Describe why you feel the student is a good fit for the campus and how the student can add to the community based on what you know about the college and its students.

**Stick to one page:** A specific, short letter is preferable to a general, long one.

**Send it in:** Share your letter with the college along with other forms like the counselor evaluation form. If you're sending a copy of a letter, be sure it is a clear photocopy. Keep a copy for yourself and don't hesitate to call the college if there is additional information you'd prefer to relay via phone.

## THINGS TO AVOID

- Listing information that's available on the application
- Paraphrasing others who are writing recommendations
- Using the same language for multiple student recommendations
- Commenting on the student's appearance
- Having typos and grammatical mistakes
- Assuming that high grades are sufficient for selective colleges to admit a student
- Underestimating the impact a compelling letter can have on a student's application