

Tips for Recommendation Letters*

Need to ask for a recommendation letter? Here are 5 tips to help:

1. **Ask for a recommendation letter from people who know you and your capabilities**, i.e., former employers, teachers, coaches, community or corporate leaders, influential friends--people who have known you a long time. Relatives are not a good choice. Three recommendation letters are enough.
2. **Be sure to give them enough time (3-4 weeks, if possible)** to write the recommendation letter.
3. **When you talk to them, state your goals and suggest what they might write to help you achieve those goals.** Coach them to be specific; general praise is a waste of space. Don't be shy. A recommendation letter is a sales letter to sell you. Now is the time to brag!
4. **Follow up your request for a recommendation letter by writing a review of your conversation.** Give suggestions for your recommendation letter. You may need to put words in their mouths. When you send them the follow-up letter, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Then, feel free to contact them in a couple of weeks to confirm that they are aware of your deadlines.
5. **Once you receive your recommendation letter, send a thank-you note.** You should also let them know about your success and how they helped you.

What if you are asked to write a recommendation letter? Ask yourself:

Are you the right person to write a letter of recommendation? If you are asked to write a recommendation letter, you need to discuss the subject candidly with the requester. A letter of recommendation is most effective when a person who knows the requester and his/her reputation writes it.

Do you qualify? Another consideration is your integrity--can you honestly write positive things about the requester? If not, you need to bow out gracefully without hurting feelings. On the other hand, if you qualify, you should brainstorm with the requester to write what he or she wishes to be said. Be sensitive to deadlines.

Ready to write a recommendation letter?

Here are 11 easy guidelines:

1. **Explain how you know the applicant.** How long have you known the person and in what relationship or circumstance?
2. **State your qualifications for writing the recommendation letter.** Why should the reader be interested in your recommendation? How many other people of the applicant's caliber have you known, and why does the applicant stand out?
3. **List the applicant's exceptional qualities and skills**, especially those that are specific to the applicant's field of interest or job requirements. For example, competency in his/her field or prior experience, organizational and communication skills, academic or other achievements, interaction with others, sound judgment, reliability, analytical ability, etc.
4. **Emphasize key points that you want the reader to note on the applicant's resume or job application.** Be sure to meaningfully elaborate, don't simply restate.
5. **Give your judgment of the applicant, his/her qualifications and potential.** Why should he/she be considered over other people? How does he/she compare to other

people you have known? Do not state weaknesses. If you can't write a positive letter of recommendation, you should respectfully decline.

6. **Give specific examples to back up what you have said about the person's qualifications and character.** Remember, generalized praise is a waste of space.
7. **Unless it is absolutely relevant, do not state (directly or by implication) the applicant's race, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender or marital status.**
8. **Don't be too brief.** One or two short paragraphs are death to a recommendation letter. On the other hand, be succinct. Make every word count. Here is a rule of thumb: a letter of recommendation for employment should be one page; a letter of recommendation for school should be 1-2 pages.
9. **Make the ending statement strong without overdoing it.** Undo praise can be viewed as biased or insincere.
10. **List your contact information** if you are willing to field follow-up correspondence.
11. **Proofread!** The letter of recommendation represents both you and the applicant.

Two more recommendation letter tips:

1. **Write only complimentary, yet factual, observations.** Avoid unflattering or derogatory remarks. If you cannot do this, you should decline to write a letter of recommendation.
2. **Remember that potential employers are adept at "reading between the lines,"** and any negative implication may destroy a person's chance at getting the new job.

* From <http://www.writeexpress.com/recommendation.htm>