Writing Letters of Recommendation: Tips and Guidelines

These tips and guidelines are designed to assist writers in composing thorough and substantive letters for applicants to graduate or professional school. Many decision-making committees depend heavily on these letters to gain insight into the personal strengths and weaknesses of an applicant, information that cannot be gleaned from the applicant's transcript or personal statement.

IMPORTANT POINTS
- Letters must be typed on official letterhead and include a signature; average length is 1-2 pages.
- According to UC Legal Counsel, if an author is aware of an aspect of an individual's behavior that could harm third persons, such as sexual misconduct or violence, and fails to disclose it in a recommendation letter, he or she may be subject to a liability claim.

LETTER COLLECTION
The Career Services Center recommends students use Interfolio.com to collect, store and distribute their letters to professional and graduate schools. As a writer, you only have to write one letter – Interfolio duplicates and sends copies to as many schools as students request.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LETTERS
- State your relationship to the applicant. Include how long and in what capacity you have known him/her.
- If you taught the applicant, state the course title(s), the applicant's academic performance (either grade or rank) and how the class was evaluated. Comment on the applicant's intellectual abilities. If appropriate, evaluate the level of difficulty of the course. An applicant’s GPA will become more meaningful if committees are aware of the nature of courses completed.
- Compare the applicant's academic performance and potential to that of his/her peers, and to that of others you know who have sought graduate or professional study.
- Relate the applicant's experience and characteristics to his or her chosen study area, desired position, or career aspiration. Mention the applicant's potential to succeed in the degree program or desired career field, his or her fitness for the stated career objective, and promise in the chosen field.
- Comment on the applicant's academic and personal strengths. Evaluate his or her particular skills and characteristics, using specific examples if you have such knowledge. Such strengths might include any of the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-discipline</th>
<th>Maturity</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Teaching/presentation skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Critical/analytical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Research skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Respect of peers</td>
<td>Writing ability</td>
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- Remember you are writing an evaluative letter which can include weaknesses or qualifiers that, taken in the context of the entire letter, form a more honest, credible and interesting picture of the applicant.
- If you know of others who think highly of the applicant, make reference to those persons.
- Volunteer to provide further information over the phone.

If you have questions about a letter of recommendation you are preparing, please feel free to contact the Career Services Center’s Professional Advising Services at (858) 534-3750.