

CAREER SERVICES

University of Wisconsin - River Falls
Room 24, East Hathorn 715-425-3572



WRITING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR STUDENTS

1. When students ask you to write letters of recommendation, tell them honestly whether or not you can write a positive recommendation. If you can write a positive letter ask for a copy of their resume or a written summary of their skills and experiences. For your own protection, it is recommended that you have the student sign an authorization on the enclosed sheet for your files. Currently, the trend is for students asking faculty to write letters of recommendation directly to the employer or graduate school. Check to see if the student wants a general letter or a letter written for a specific position or program which would required highlighting the required skills and attributes.
2. Find out what kind of position or graduate program the student is applying for and what skills are necessary to do that kind of work.
3. When writing the letter use specific examples of relevant skills. You may want to follow a format similar to the one listed below when you are deciding what to include in the letter.
 - Q. What did the student do?
 - A. "Wrote and edited...
 - Q. What information will specifically illustrate this skill?
 - A. ... a training manual for a social service agency ...
 - Q. What was a specific result of the student's effort? (Including a result adds strength to your recommendation, but is not always applicable.)
 - A. ... which has helped the agency retain volunteer workers."
4. Some areas to focus on might include:
 - ❖ Written and oral communication skills
 - ❖ Technical skills
 - ❖ Work attitudes
 - ❖ Interpersonal skills
 - ❖ Resourcefulness
 - ❖ Organization skills
5. You may want to ask the student for feedback on a draft of your letter.
6. It is appropriate to write the letter on your organization's letterhead and give it directly to the student.
7. Keep a copy of any letter of recommendation you write in your files.

Student Teacher Letters of Recommendation

Tips:

- ❖ Be factual; do not editorialize. Avoid vague statements.
- ❖ A good practice is to avoid giving personal opinions or feelings. However, if you make subjective statements or give opinions because they are requested, clearly identify them as opinions, not as fact.
- ❖ If you give an opinion, explain the incident or circumstances upon which you base the opinion.
- ❖ Be able to document all the information you release.
- ❖ Do not include information that might indicate the individual's race, color, religion, national origin, age, handicap, citizenship status, sex (unless by the individual's name it is obvious), or marital status.

Source: NACE Legal Monograph: A New Dilemma: Reference Letters and Checks

Some areas to focus on might include:

- ❖ written and oral communication skills
- ❖ listening skills
- ❖ cooperative attitude
- ❖ reliability/dependability
- ❖ teaching skills
- ❖ classroom management skills
- ❖ resourcefulness (someone who takes the initiative)
- ❖ leadership
- ❖ knowledge of educational principles and methods
- ❖ knowledge of subject matter they are teaching
- ❖ ethical standards
- ❖ organization skills
- ❖ interest in professional development
- ❖ involvement in other school activities
- ❖ sense of humor

Source: Employment Strategies for Teachers: A Guide

Suggested Guidelines for Reference Givers

Written References

1. Provide a written reference **only** if a student has given your name as a reference.
2. When you prepare reference letters, be factual; do not editorialize. Avoid vague statements.
3. Respond to the specific inquiry about the student or job applicant. Direct the response to the particular person who requested the information.
4. If a "to whom it may concern" reference letter is requested, document that this is the type of reference requested and that the student or job applicant takes responsibility for disseminating the letter to the proper persons.
5. Relate references to the specific position for which the person applied and the work that the applicant will perform.
6. A good practice is to **avoid giving personal opinions or feelings**. However, if you make subjective statements or give opinions because they are requested, clearly identify them as opinions and not as fact.
7. If you give an opinion, explain the incident or circumstances upon which you base the opinion.
8. **Be able to document all information you release.**
9. State in the letter, "This information is confidential, should be treated as such, and is provided at the request of (name of student or applicant), who has asked me to serve as a reference." Statements such as this give justification for the communication and leave no doubt that the information was not given to hurt a person's reputation.
10. Do not include information that might indicate the individual's race, color, religion, national origin, age, handicap, citizenship status, sex (unless by the individual's name it is obvious), or marital status.

Verbal References

1. Do not disclose information regarding a student's education record without the written consent of the student.
2. Informal "lunch" discussions or "off the record" telephone conversations with prospective employers regarding a student's performance should be avoided unless the student is aware of the discussions and has given approval for such conversations.
3. Information given should be factual, based upon personal knowledge/observation of the student through direct contact with the student.
4. If any employer contacts faculty and advises the faculty that a student has given permission for the faculty member(s) to give a verbal reference, verification of this permission should be obtained from the student before giving any information to the employer. Such verification can include a copy of the student's signed employment application listing the faculty as a reference, or a verbal confirmation by the student, followed by written confirmation.
5. When giving verbal references, guidelines 2-10 (excluding 4) regarding written references also should be followed in addition to the guidelines listed above in this section.

Action Verbs

Management Skills

administered
analyzed
assigned
attained
chaired
contracted
consolidated
coordinated
delegated
developed
directed
evaluated
executed
improved
increased
organized
oversaw
planned
prioritized
produced
recommended
reviewed
scheduled
strengthened
supervised

Communication Skills

addressed
arbitrated
arranged
authored
corresponded
developed
directed
drafted
edited
enlisted
formulated
influenced
interpreted
lectured

mediated
moderated
motivated
negotiated
persuaded
promoted
publicized
reconciled
recruited
spoke
translated
wrote

Research Skills

clarified
collected
critiqued
diagnosed
evaluated
examined
extracted
identified
inspected
interpreted
interviewed
investigated
organized
reviewed
summarized
surveyed
systematized

Technical Skills

assembled
built
calculated
computed
designed
devised
engineered
fabricated
maintained
operated

overhauled
programmed
remodeled
repaired
solved
trained
upgraded

Teaching Skills

adapted
advised
clarified
coached
communicated
coordinated
developed
enabled
encouraged
evaluated
explained
facilitated
guided
informed
initiated
instructed
persuaded
set goals
stimulated

Financial Skills

administered
allocated
analyzed
appraised
audited
balanced
budgeted
calculated
computed
developed
forecast
managed
marketed

planned
projected
researched

Creative Skills

acted
conceptualized
created
designed
developed
directed
established
fashioned
founded
illustrated
instituted
integrated
introduced
invented
originated
performed
planned
revitalized
shaped

Helping Skills

assessed
assisted
clarified
coached
counseled
demonstrated
diagnosed
educated
expedited
facilitated
familiarized
guided
rehabilitated
represented

Clerical Skills

approved
arranged
catalogued
classified
collected
compiled
dispatched
executed
generated
implemented
inspected
monitored
operated
organized
prepared
processed
purchased
recorded
retrieved
screened
specified
systematized
tabulated
validated

For your protection, have students sign and date an authorization before you write a letter of recommendation for them. Make copies of this form as needed. Keep authorizations in your files with copies of the letters you write.

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____

I authorize _____ to speak or write a letter of recommendation on my behalf

Signature _____ Date _____