

How to Write an Impactful Recommendation Letter

Recommendation letters are a critical piece of the college application. They provide additional insight into the student that may not otherwise be evident in their application. As the admissions process becomes more holistic and less focused on grades and scores, a well-written recommendation letter can tip the scale in the student's favor.

While it's always helpful if the student excelled in your class, team or organization, what's more important is their ability, character, and impact on their community – both in and out of school. The best recommendation letters come from people who have spent enough quality time with the student to really know who they are and what they're capable of achieving.

The Components of an Impactful Letter:

1. Introduce yourself

- Identify who you are – include your job title/role and the organization where you work or volunteer.
- Teachers: include the subject you teach and the specific course(s) you taught the student.
- Advisors: include the name of the club/activity that you oversee where the student was an active member.
- Coaches: include the sport you coach and the level at which you coached the student (club, JV, and/or varsity).

2. Describe your relationship with the student

- How long have you known the student?
- In what capacity?
- Advisors/coaches: What was the student's role? Think about positions held (president, captain) and non-titled roles (such as taking responsibility for the club/team's social media pages).

3. Provide details about the student's ability, character, and impact.

- What were your first impressions of the student?
- How have you seen them develop?
- Give specific examples of their abilities and impact.
- How do they interact with their peers and adults?
- Did they take on additional responsibility without being asked?
- Include any awards the student received and competitions and group/individual projects that the student participated in.
- Teachers: consider the student's classroom interactions and performance on assignments/projects.
- Advisors: consider the student's impact on their school or other community.
- Coaches: consider the student's interactions and impact both on and off the field.

4. Describe how the student will be an asset to the college to which they are applying.
 - What are the student's abilities and how will the student improve the college community?
5. Conclude your letter
 - Restate your support of the student's qualifications.
 - Offer to provide additional information if requested.
 - Provide a means to contact you such as your email or phone number.