

## Tips for Writing Recommendation Letters for Professional Schools

Many of your students will be asking you for full letters of recommendation on letterhead, even if they also ask you to fill out the form for the Pre-Professional Advisement and Evaluation Committee. These letters are a very important component of the application process. Although some of you may be used to writing such letters, others of you may not have as much experience. **If you do *not* feel that you can write a glowing letter on behalf of the student, perhaps because you do not know the student well enough, or you feel the applicant does not deserve a glowing recommendation from you, then it is in the best interest of the student not to write the letter. A letter that provides insufficient evidence of the student's abilities and potential is often perceived negatively by admissions committees.** If you do agree to write a letter, here are some suggestions to make your life a bit easier.

1. Ask the applicant for a copy of his or her application essay, resume, and transcript, so that you will have an overall view of the applicant. That way your letter of recommendation will complement the application rather than duplicate it. It is not necessary to state what is already on the resume or transcript, since that will already be on the student's application. If necessary, discuss with the student aspects of his/her record and his/her motivation for the chosen field.

2. Describe your qualifications for comparing the applicant to other students.

For example---I have been teaching at FIU for 20 years, and teach approximately 400 students annually. I have also advised approximately 50 undergraduate students on independent research projects.

3. Discuss to what extent you know the applicant. Make it as personal as possible.

For example---I first had the pleasure of getting to know Mr. X while he visited me during office hours to discuss advanced concepts not covered in class. Then he worked in my laboratory for the next academic year, participated in weekly lab meetings, and traveled with me and several graduate students to a national meeting, where he presented a poster.

4. Choose several qualities that you have observed in the applicant. (Leadership, responsibility, motivation, integrity, ability to work collaboratively, communication skills, empathy, altruism, problem solving ability, common sense, etc.)

For example---Ms. X is hardworking, outgoing, and has excellent analytical skills.

5. In discussing those qualities, explain specific examples where the applicant demonstrated them, being as detailed as possible. It may be helpful to describe specific incidents.

For example---He was very diligent; he always came to class prepared, and was not afraid to ask questions—a delight to have in lecture. When I divided the class into groups, he was always the first to volunteer to be a group leader, and I observed the positive interactions he had with his classmates, and the respect they had for him.

For example--His written communication skills are concise, focused and well-executed, and his answers to exam questions and additional assignments covered a depth of knowledge shown only by students with an excellent background in science and math.

6. Try to compare or rank him or her against other applicants.

For example---I would rank him in the top 1% of the students whom I have taught at FIU.

For example---She is the most mature undergraduate student I have come across in my 20 years of teaching.

7. Discuss the applicant's potential in his or her chosen field.

For example- I have absolutely no doubt that Mr. X has the academic ability and interpersonal skills to be a first class physician.