

HOW TO WRITE A TEACHER EVALUATION

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What should you know before you write?

- Can you write an honest letter of support for this candidate? If for some reason you cannot support a student's candidacy, gently advise that student to find another recommendation writer.
- In your letter, briefly identify yourself and your relationship to the student (for how long and in what capacity do you know him/her?) Identify the class(es) taught and the level of rigor.
- Understand your confidentiality rights. Even if students do not waive their right to review your letter, they will only have the ability to do so at the institution at which they matriculate.

Where's the best place to start?

- Review the student's work, talk with colleagues, and write down any anecdotes or examples of classroom performance to help the college differentiate this student from other applicants.
- What specific and distinguishing characteristics are most important for you to communicate about this student? Are there passions or personal qualities that would characterize this candidate?
- Avoid spending valuable letter space addressing the student's resume or time spent outside of your class unless you have experienced their contributions to an activity or project directly.
- Remember the importance of your first and last sentences. Experienced readers glance at the opening and concluding sentences before deciding if the letter is worth reading. Your first sentence should get the reader's attention, and the last should summarize your recommendation.
- Keep your recommendation concise and easy to read. The letter preferably should be limited to one page and include paragraphs or subheadings. Longer letters will most likely be skimmed; instead provide concise statements that effectively emphasize two or three well-chosen attributes.

What should be addressed?

- Use any superlative you honestly can. Not every student can be the best, but there are countless categories – most memorable, satisfying to teach, insightful, engaged, or energetic. Tell the college what stands out about the applicant. Use details and give concrete examples to back up your view.
- Remember, your letter will provide the opportunity for a college to see what growth that student may have exhibited, insights he/she may have contributed to your class, talents which may not be obvious, and personal characteristics or qualities that may be particularly outstanding.
- If you have a story to tell about a student, tell it. A good anecdote is far more effective than even the most carefully chosen list of adjectives. Tell things that are not provided anywhere else in the application, particularly things that could not be gleaned from the transcript or the list of activities.
- Are there ways to address your student's personal characteristics – curiosity, open-mindedness, leadership, integrity, compassion, maturity and independence – using specific examples?
- Can you convey some sense of the quality of the student's mind – Imagination, intellectual zeal, penetrating analysis, contributions to the intellectual climate, perceptive understanding, self-awareness, diverse interests or perspectives – with details that go beyond a list of adjectives?
- Have you addressed the how and why of what you are saying in your recommendation? Can you place this student within the context of other students you have taught? Are your comments precise and substantive? Have you provided evidence of your claims?

What if it's not all good news?

- Don't be afraid of making some critical comments. Only glowing remarks, especially for average students, may make the reader skeptical and weaken credibility. It is okay to address weaknesses, especially if the student has grown. Strengths, then, will be more distinguishable and believable
- If a student has a rising or declining record over the course of the year, offer an explanation that might be helpful in understanding the change. Include specific examples of motivation, commitment, hard work, improvement, growth, and potential for success.
- Trust that the reader can read between the lines of effusive as well as more muted writing. Every letter of recommendation cannot and should not be over the top; but it should be honest.