



REFERENCE LETTER WRITING GUIDELINES

DECISION TO WRITE REFERENCE LETTERS:

- ✧ **IMPORTANCE OF LETTERS:** Many admissions and hiring committees depend heavily on recommendations to gain insight into applicants' personal strengths and weaknesses.
- ✧ **BE SPECIFIC:** If you think that you do not know a student well enough to write a recommendation or if you do not have the time, it is better to inform him/her beforehand. To write a generic letter or state that a student is average may be the "kiss of death" for an applicant.
- ✧ **INCLUDE WEAKNESSES:** Although this point is not meant to discourage negative comments, you may decide to discuss with the student if you choose to include any qualifiers or weaknesses.

LETTER FORMAT:

- ✧ We suggest one page, using 12 point font on official letterhead.
- ✧ Letters should be dated, include your full name and title, and original signature.
- ✧ Graduate school and health professions letters may be addressed to the "ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE," and employment letters can be addressed to the "HIRING COMMITTEE" or the "HUMAN RESOURCES SUPERVISOR."
- ✧ Bold the student's name in the text of the letter. For medical school applicants, type the candidate's name and, if you know it, AMCAS Identification in the upper right hand corner of each page.

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

- ✧ **APPLICANT'S RELATIONSHIP TO EVALUATOR:** Evaluator's identification (title, position, institution); how long and in what capacity you have known the applicant.
- ✧ **INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS:** Applicant's ability to learn and retain information; approach and attitude toward coursework, research, or activities; evidence of analytical and independent thinking; intellectual curiosity/creativity; consistency of performance; ability relative to other students.
- ✧ **COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Ability to organize and articulate thoughts, both in written and oral expression.
- ✧ **PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES:** Evidence of motivation, persistence, and dedication; applicant's ability to cooperate and get along with other students and individuals; evidence of other positive attributes: maturity, flexibility, honesty, enthusiasm, reliability, sincerity, leadership, etc.
- ✧ **APPLICANT'S BACKGROUND:** Any unusual aspects of the applicant's background that might contribute to or hinder academic work; participation in college extracurricular activities; knowledge of the rigor of students' course load.

**Reference
Letter Service**
UCSB Career Services
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805 893 4416
(FAX) 805 893 8023
www.career.ucsb.edu

Adapted from Stanford University Advisory Center and UCSB Health Professions Office