

Sample Recommendation Letters

The next 2 pages contain fictional examples of recommendation letters. Both letters recommend students for opportunities. The content is imaginary, but the format is realistic. The format, type of content, and tone are suitable for recommendations submitted to recipients in the United States. Norms in these regards may differ in some other countries.

A Fictional Letter of Recommendation for a Student One Knows Well and Considers Excellent

[Letterhead]

Comment [BG1]: Letterhead is official stationery from your university, research institute, or other institution.

February 1, 2012

Comment [BG2]: Remember to include the date.

Sarah A. Stargazer, PhD
Director of Graduate Studies
Department of Astronomy
Universe University
Collegetown, Anystate 00000

Comment [BG3]: This part of the letter is called the inside address.

Dear Sally:

Comment [BG4]: Because the letter-writer knows the recipient well, he has used her given name (and in fact, her nickname). Normally, one would address the recipient more formally (for example, as Dr. Stargazer or Professor Stargazer). If unsure who the recipient will be, one can say "To Whom It May Concern" or something like "Dear Selection Committee".

I am delighted to recommend **Thomas Trulystellar** for admission to the graduate program in astronomy at Universe University. Mr. Trulystellar, who in May will receive his BS in earth and planetary science, is the most outstanding undergraduate I have worked with in the last decade, and I believe he has the makings of an excellent researcher.

Comment [BG5]: The first paragraph indicates who the applicant is and what he is applying for.

I first met Mr. Trulystellar in his freshman year, when he took the course Fundamentals of Planetary Science from me. Afterward he arranged to work with my group through the undergraduate research awards program. Despite a heavy course load, he has spent 10 to 20 hours per week with us every semester. He also worked with us the past two summers. As well as contributing to our project on _____, he completed a study using _____ to _____. In October he presented his findings in a poster at the International _____ Symposium, and a paper based on this study has been accepted by the *Journal of* _____. I am impressed with his fund of knowledge, his diligence and resourcefulness, and his adeptness in the research setting.

Comment [BG6]: Boldfacing the applicant's name when it first appears makes it easy to find.

Comment [BG7]: The second paragraph of this letter indicates how the letter-writer knows the applicant. It also contains details about what the applicant has done and how well he has done it.

Mr. Trulystellar's classroom work has likewise been exemplary, earning him election to Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year. He also is well-rounded, participating in intramural sports and writing a column for the campus newspaper. Despite his achievements, he is down-to-earth and unassuming, and his warm personality makes working with him especially enjoyable. I look forward to discussing his qualifications further when I see you at AAAS.

Comment [BG8]: This paragraph speaks more broadly about the applicant's performance and characteristics. Commonly, **one or more paragraphs** in this part of the letter present such content.

In short, Mr. Trulystellar shows exceptional promise for a career in astronomy, and I look forward to having him as a colleague. I recommend him with enthusiasm.

Comment [BG9]: The last paragraph of the letter summarizes what was said and provides an overall assessment.

Sincerely,

Comment [BG10]: A relatively formal closing, such as "Sincerely", is appropriate in a letter of this type. In the space below, the writer of the letter should sign his name.

Gary Galaxy, PhD
Professor of Planetary Science

Comment [BG11]: The person's name and professional title should appear below the signature. Academic degrees tend to be optional to include; how commonly they are included seems to differ among fields.

A Fictional Recommendation, Suitable to Adapt for Use on a Form, for a Student with Whom One Has Had Relatively Little Contact

I am very pleased to recommend **Dorothy Diseasedetective**, a third-year student at Midstate School of Medicine, for the research elective program at the Center for Epidemiologic Research.

During her first year of medical school, Ms. Diseasedetective took the required course Introduction to Epidemiology and Biostatistics, which I direct. Of the 160 students in the course, she was one of 18 receiving a letter of recognition. Her scores on both examinations were outstanding, and the faculty member leading her discussion group wrote that Ms. Diseasedetective “is exceptionally adept at devising and critiquing research designs, exhibits excellent quantitative and verbal skills, and is very hard-working.”

Since completing the course, Ms. Diseasedetective has come to see me at least twice to discuss careers in preventive medicine and epidemiologic research. I am impressed with the amount of reading she has done in these fields and the thoughtfulness of her comments on it. I am also impressed with her sense of commitment to the health of the public.

In sum, Ms. Diseasedetective is a highly able and motivated student who could gain much from an elective at the Center and could contribute much to the project to which she is assigned. It is thus my pleasure to recommend her for your program.

Comment [BG12]: A relatively short recommendation, such as the one below, can serve as the body of a letter or can be inserted into a standardized recommendation form.

Comment [BG13]: The first paragraph indicates who the applicant is and what she is applying for.

Comment [BG14]: Boldfacing the applicant’s name when it first appears makes it easy to find.

Comment [BG15]: The second paragraph indicates how the letter-writer knows the applicant. It contains specific details about what the applicant has done and how well she has done it.

Comment [BG16]: Rather than merely saying that the student did very well, the letter-writer provides quantitative evidence.

Comment [BG17]: After saying a little more about how the letter-writer knows the applicant, the third paragraph provides mainly evaluation.

Comment [BG18]: The last paragraph summarizes and provides an overall recommendation.

Comment [BG19]: If a recommendation will appear on a standardized form, normally a closing and signature will not appear below it. However, a written or electronic signature might appear elsewhere on the form. If this recommendation will appear as the body of a letter, of course the other parts of a letter also should be present, as in the first example of a recommendation.