



Guidelines for Teacher Recommendations

2012-2013

Counseling & Advising

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Guidelines for Teacher Recommendations

Counseling & Advising

As part of the college application process, most colleges and universities ask for letters of recommendation from Secondary School College Counselors (referred to as School Letters of Recommendation) and from 1 or 2 teachers (referred to as Teacher Recommendations) who can comment in detail on the student's academic performance and strengths in the classroom. Colleges have suggested that we not only address a student's strengths but also that we should "attempt to convince" them why a particular student should be admitted over hundreds of other applicants who may appear equally qualified on paper. To assist in this important process, here is the procedure we would like you to follow and some letter writing suggestions and tips.

Procedure:

1. Students have been instructed to ask teachers for recommendations in person before turning in the formal written request form to the College Counseling Office. In turn, the College Counseling staff will record and provide a copy of the request form to the teacher once a student has turned in the proper paperwork (see the Student Request Form on the final page).
2. The letter that you provide is **confidential** for several reasons and should **not** be released to the student or parent. Maintaining confidentiality is important because:
 - **Confidential** letters hold more weight in the college admission process.
 - The Overlake School will only disclose **disciplinary** records (probation, suspension, expulsion) to colleges and universities that *request* the information. The College Counselors will address these situations on a case-by-case basis when appropriate; teachers **should not** address disciplinary actions.
 - Legally, **you are not authorized to address a student's disability without a signed waiver from the parents**. If you feel the need to address the issue, please check with one of the College Counselors, as we maintain a release of information waiver for students regarding diagnosed learning differences.
3. A *Teacher* letter of recommendation varies in nature and content from the *Counselor/School* letter of recommendation. One "most selective" college indicated recently that their primary interest is knowing about a student's intellectual vitality, academic excellence, and impact in the community. A good faculty letter of recommendation will:
 - Focus on the student's academic performance and most distinguishing intellectual qualities *within the context of their course*.
 - Use *specific examples* as evidence of a student's unique qualities and what makes this student stand out apart from others.
 - **Not** focus on the student's extracurricular activities unless one of those activities has played a role in your class.
4. The letter should be limited to **one** page, printed on Overlake letterhead, and have your signature. There is electronic letterhead available on DropPoint at [N:\Teacher Rec Guide](#)
5. We request that you turn in your letter of recommendation to the College Counseling Office so that we can include it with other student information (transcript, secondary school report, School letter of recommendation, and School Profile) to be submitted all at once. **We must meet deadlines established by the college/university**, and therefore, the College Counseling Office will need your letter **at least two weeks** prior to the college or university's established deadline.

General deadlines:

College/University application deadline:	Teacher letter of rec due to College Counseling Office:
November 1	October 15
November 15	November 1
November 30/December 1	November 15
December 15 & all later deadlines	December 1

PLEASE NOTE: If you know you **will not** be able to meet the College Counseling Office deadline, please mail your letter directly to the college/university. In this situation, notify the student, who will then provide you with pre-addressed stamped envelopes to mail your letter of recommendation. A copy of the letter should also be provided to the College Counseling Office to be put in the student's file for possible future use if other colleges or scholarship applications are added to the list.

Tips & Suggestions:

- Do not feel obligated to fill out the Teacher Evaluation form that is provided with many applications (Common App etc.). Many times admissions officers are in a hurry and may quickly glance at the form rather than read the letter that you may have spent hours preparing which provides a clearer picture of the student.
- Your recommendations can, and often do, give students a distinctive edge in the admissions process.
- Focus on the student's academic performance and intellectual qualities. Don't write about non-academic interests and activities unless you can comment on them from personal experience.
- If you have a story to tell about a student, tell it. A good anecdote is far more effective than a list of adjectives.
- A positive tone is important, but don't go overboard with superlatives. It's important to be honest but keep in mind too much flattery diminishes your credibility.
- Be honest - college admission officers see the transcript. If the student struggled in your class or you know the student has struggled in other classes, describing them as an "outstanding student" may need some explanation or qualification.
- It's okay to say no. If you honestly can't give the student a positive letter of recommendation, than he or she is better served by asking someone else than having you submit a moderate recommendation on their behalf.

Questions to consider while writing the letter:

- To what extent has this student reached or gone beyond the expectations of your course?
- How has this student shown intellectual stamina, integrity, seriousness of purpose, willingness to find solutions, critical and analytical thinking skills?
- How does this student blend and balance life? For example, blending academics and music, athletics, service, work etc.
- How did this student evolve and progress over the course of the semester or year?
- Can this student work well in teams?
- How has this student made you laugh? How has she/he enhanced you as a teacher and as a member of our school community?
- Other focus areas:
 - Evidence of Intellectual Ability
 - Response to Assignments
 - Promptness
 - Written Work
 - In Class Discussion
 - Attitude in Class
 - Classroom Interaction
 - Inquiring Attitude of Mind
 - Resiliency/Responses to Setbacks

For More Information:

If you would like to discuss this process or other aspects of your letter, please stop by to chat with Diane or Lindsay in the Counseling & Advising office.

Descriptive Words & Prompts
Writing Letters of Recommendation

DESCRIBING THE STUDENT

Organized	Intelligent	Confident	Optimistic	Perseverance	Perceptive
Determined	Self-disciplined	Unassuming	Motivated	Respectful	Sensitive
Diligent	Creative	Articulate	Inquisitive	Mature	Intellectual
Personable	Probing	Popular	Flexible	Outgoing	Serious
Independent	Analytical	Inquisitive	Mature	Intellectual	Energetic
Consistent	Enthusiastic	Stable	Dedicated	Artistic	Conscientious
Imaginative	Level-headed	Tenacious	Perceptive	Affable	Thorough
Humorous	Self-confident	Considerate	Reliable	fun	Focused
Warm	Self-starter	Poised	Honest	Insightful	Original

STRENGTHS & NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS

Has integrity	Keeps promises	Helpful to others
Participates extracurricular	Exception emotional maturity	Critical (deep, quiet) thinker
Willing to dig out of a hole	Accepts constructive criticism	Positive attitude
Consistent effort	Incredible drive	Works well with others
Asks vital questions	Stands out from the crowd	Hard worker
Disciplined work habits	Unique sense of humor	Ravid reader
Quick to apply information	Remarkable insight	Personal integrity
Staying power	Willing to defend position	Goes beyond the expected

More descriptors

Academically talented
Able student
Accountable
Adept

Analytical
Asset in the classroom
Accomplished
Attentive

Bright
Brilliant

Continue to blossom		Sense of commitment
Comptent student	Gifted	Sets standards of excellence
Creative	Goes beyond what is expected	Success story
Consummate		Skillful
Competitive	Highly motivated	Sine qua non
Cooperative		Scholarly
	Intelligent	Serious
Devoted	Industrious	Solid
Dedicated		Sparkling
Distinguished	Old fashioned work ethic	Successful
Diligent	Outstanding	
Determined		Tremendous desire
	Prudent student	Tremendously talented
Eager learner	Pride in work	Tackled challenging subjects
Earnest	Proficient	
Epitome		Verbal skills
Exemplary	Quiet intelligence	
Enthusiasm for learning		Work habits
Excellent	Resourceful	
Exceptional	Respected by faculty	Zealous
	Receptive to instruction	
Focused		

PERSONALITY DESCRIPTORS

Altruistic	Friendly	Loyal
Accountable	Friend to others	
Admirable	Full of life	Mature
Appearance		Modest
Articulate	Genuine	
	Good head on his/her shoulders	Not swayed by others
Conscientious	Great listener	Organized
Compassionate	Goal achiever	One of a kind
Considerate		Optimistic
Concern for others	High ethical standards	Own person
Cooperative	Honest	Outgoing
Communication skills	Humble	
Courteous	Honorable	Personable
Courageous	High personal initiative	Positive attitude
		Positive influence
Does what's right	Independent	Principled
	Inspires others	
Energized	Integrity	Quiet confidence
Enthusiastic		
Excellent character	Kind	Respects authority
Exceptional young man/woman	Kind hearted	Respected
		Respect for others

Radiates enthusiasm
Reliable
Respectful

Self-assured
Self-confident
Sensitive

Unassuming
Vibrant spirit
Values and ethics

Self-starter
Sincere
Strong sense of responsibility
Supportive of others
Sense of humor
Self-directed

Team player
Terrific interpersonal skills
Trustworthy
Tolerant and accepting of others

Well-rounded
Well-mannered
Work ethic

Some "finish this sentence" prompts...

"From [this student's] first days in my class, I knew..."

"I can tell when [this student] is engaged because...."

"I have particularly noticed [this student's] growth in..."

"When [this student] is absent,"

"The first thing I think of when I think of [this student] is the time...."

"The kinds of questions that interest [this student] are..."

"One day, when we spoke outside of class, [this student]..."

"Sometimes I wonder if [this student]..."

"I can easily imagine [this student]..."

"One thing that really stands out about [this student] is..."

"At our school, [this student] has a reputation for..."

"It seems that [this student] draws strength from..."

"When I imagine [this student] in college, I see..."

Sample Teacher Recommendation (provided by Pepperdine University)

Seaver College Admission
Pepperdine University
Malibu, CA 90263-4392

Dear Admissions Committee:

XXXXX, who was a student in my Junior Honors English class last year, is an early action applicant to Seaver College. Intelligent, creative, and perceptive, XXXXX enjoys both learning and expressing herself through her writing. A very talented writer, she envisions the world and her experiences from a fresh, insightful perspective which she communicates with powerful images in both poetry and prose. Her facility with language use complements the thoughtful exploration and expression of ideas in her academic writing.

A thoughtful, reflective reader, XXXXX responds to assigned reading with enjoyment and understanding, continually questioning with a sincere desire to clarify and to grow. In class discussion, she offers cogent, articulate observations and interpretations. In group activities, particularly those which are project-oriented, she often assumes a leadership position—suggesting divergent possibilities and offering her artistic talents in bringing them to realization. In her role as one of the editors of the school newspaper, her dedication and determination inspire others to greater effort.

XXXXX possesses an informed understanding of and definitive points of view on contemporary issues, such as women's rights and protection of the environment. She has a strong sense of what is important to her, while exhibiting sense of social and civic responsibility as well as genuine concern for others in her interactions and contributions. Last year, XXXXX and I were both voluntary participants on a committee charged with defining a school-wide approach to academic integrity—a topic about which we found we shared strong convictions.

Personally, XXXXX is intense, sensitive, compassionate, responsible and trustworthy. Self-consciously reflective, she critically examines values, philosophies and lifestyles as she defines and modifies her own. XXXXX's individuality and self-confidence enable her to make decisions based upon mature judgment and personal values rather than being unduly influenced by such external factors as peer pressure or grades.

I recommend XXXXX highly, both for academic excellence and for personal promise. She will respond with enthusiasm to the challenging academic experience offered at Pepperdine.

Sincerely,

English Department Chair

Sample Teacher Recommendation (provided by Dartmouth College)

To Whom It May Concern:

XXXXX was a student in my English classes during her sophomore and juniors years at Central High School. I found her to be diligent, precise, accomplished, mature, and intellectual. She is a warm and pleasant person who is an analytical and talented writer. She is gifted with extraordinary abilities in English language and literature.

While she was a student in my Advanced Literature and Language class during her sophomore year, I became aware of her intense powers of concentration. Her eyes never left me during class lectures or discussions. She was always ready to defend or define her reasoned opinions with specific and pointed evidence from the text or past experience.

XXXXX elected to become a student in World Literature I and II during her junior year. These classes are a chronological survey of world literatures from ancient Sumerians to that of contemporary cultures. I would estimate that this class is much more difficult for juniors than Advanced Placement English is for seniors. Not only do the students engage in a disciplined study of such works as, Hamlet, La Commedia, The Pentateuch, and Ellison's Invisible Man, but there is also a sharp focus on the development of composition skills. XXXXX easily scored the highest A of all fifty-five students who took the course last year.

This young woman also produced two of the most memorable junior research papers I have ever read. Her paper on the satire of Jonathan Swift was a pure joy to read. It was typical of the developed mental processes she displayed throughout the year. Her paper on the picaresque novel was nothing short of amazing. I would have been proud to submit that paper for any of the English classes I took as a senior at the University of Illinois.

Not only is XXXXX an outstanding scholar, but she is involved in a variety of extracurricular activities such as the Student Council and the Yearbook Production Staff. You can find her at almost any function that is sanctioned by the school.

XXXXX is one of the top five students I have taught in the last eighteen years. She radiates energy, warmth, intelligence, and gracefulness. She will be a credit to any school that accepts her for admission. I welcome her presence in my classroom.

TO THE APPLICANT

After completing all the relevant questions below, give this form to a teacher who has taught you an **academic** subject (for example, English, foreign language, math, science, or social studies). **If applying via mail**, please also give that teacher stamped envelopes addressed to each institution that requires a Teacher Evaluation.

Legal Name _____ Female
 Male
Last/Family/Sur (Enter name **exactly** as it appears on official documents.) First/Given Middle (complete) Jr., etc.

Birth Date _____ CAID (Common App ID) _____
mm/dd/yyyy

Address _____
Number & Street Apartment # City/Town State/Province Country ZIP/Postal Code

School you now attend _____ Country Code

IMPORTANT PRIVACY NOTICE: Under the terms of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), after you matriculate you *will* have access to this form and all other recommendations and supporting documents submitted by you and on your behalf, unless at least one of the following is true:

- The institution does not save recommendations post-matriculation (see www.commonapp.org/FERPA).
- You waive your right to access below, regardless of the institution to which you are sent:
 - Yes, I do waive my right to access, and I understand I will not see this form or any other recommendations submitted for me or on my behalf.
 - No, I do *not* waive my right to access, and I may someday choose to see this form or any other recommendation or supporting documents submitted by me or on my behalf to the institution at which I'm enrolling, if that institution saves them after I matriculate.

Required Signature _____ Date _____

TO THE TEACHER

The Common Application membership finds candid evaluations helpful in choosing from among highly qualified candidates. You are encouraged to keep this form in your private files for use should the student need additional recommendations. Please submit your references promptly, and **remember to sign below before mailing directly to the college/university admission office. Do not mail this form to The Common Application offices.**

Teacher's Name (Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr.) _____ Subject Taught _____
Please print or type

Signature _____ Date _____
mm/dd/yyyy

Secondary School _____

School Address _____
Number & Street City/Town State/Province Country ZIP/Postal Code

Teacher's Telephone (_____) _____ Teacher's E-mail _____
Area/Country/City Code Number Ext.

Background Information

How long have you known this student and in what context? _____

What are the first words that come to your mind to describe this student? _____

In which grade level(s) was the student enrolled when you taught him/her? 9 10 11 12 Other _____

List the courses in which you have taught this student, including the level of course difficulty (AP, IB, accelerated, honors, elective; 100-level, 200-level; etc.).

Ratings Compared to other students in his or her class year, how do you rate this student in terms of:

	No basis	Below average	Average	Good (above average)	Very good (well above average)	Excellent (top 10%)	Outstanding (top 5%)	One of the top few I've encountered (top 1%)
Academic achievement								
Intellectual promise								
Quality of writing								
Creative, original thought								
Productive class discussion								
Respect accorded by faculty								
Disciplined work habits								
Maturity								
Motivation								
Leadership								
Integrity								
Reaction to setbacks								
Concern for others								
Self-confidence								
Initiative, independence								
OVERALL								

Evaluation Please write whatever you think is important about this student, including a description of academic and personal characteristics, as demonstrated in your classroom. We welcome information that will help us to differentiate this student from others. (Feel free to attach an additional sheet or another reference you may have prepared on behalf of this student.)

COMPLETION & SUBMISSION OF THIS FORM NOT NECESSARY LETTER ONLY PREFERRED



Form G. Teacher Recommendation Request

Counseling & Advising

Many colleges require that you submit recommendation letters (recs, for short) from 1-2 teachers with your application. Some colleges designate which teachers in particular they are interested in hearing from and some colleges ask that these letters come from teachers of “core” academic subjects: English, Math, Science, History and Foreign Languages. **If the colleges you are applying to have a preference, make sure you know which teachers they need recs from before asking your teachers.**

Please follow the steps below to secure your recs in a timely fashion:

1. Ask your teacher **in person** if he/she would be willing to write a letter for you **AT LEAST** 4 weeks in advance of your earliest deadline.
2. If he/she agrees, complete this form and return it to the College Counseling Office **by September 4 (or earlier)**, and we will make note and give it to the teacher(s) of your choice. Please see us in the College Counseling Office as soon as possible if you need an extension to this deadline.

Please keep the following key points in mind:

- The teacher(s) you ask for recs will provide their letter(s) to the College Counseling Office; the recs will then be submitted with your transcript and Secondary School Report to the colleges on your list.
- If you alter your college application list in any way, please fill out Form D (Adjustment to College Application List) in the College Counseling Office to adjust where we need to send your transcript and recs.
- You will probably not need more than 2 teacher recs and we therefore discourage you from seeking more.
- You will probably be allowed by the colleges to add an additional letter from someone else who knows you well— usually outside of school (i.e. from a job, service, or extracurricular activity).
- Overlake’s College Counselors seek input toward your School Letter of Recommendation from your Homeroom Advisor. If you would like us to consider other input from someone else at Overlake who knows you well (such as a coach or club advisor), please fill out and return the Coach Appraisal Form or Extracurricular Activity Report Form, available in the College Counseling office.

Your Name: _____ Homeroom Advisor: _____

Teacher: _____ Class: _____ Grade Taken: 10 11 12

Other Teacher(s) you plan to request: 1. _____ 2. _____

A.) What is your earliest deadline: _____

B.) Colleges on Your Application List:

College/University	Please use this space for any additional colleges or comments
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

**Please verify deadlines directly with each college*

