



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
M O N T E N E G R O



Education
USA

Your Official Source on U.S. Higher Education

**Exciting Insights into
Writing Effective
Recommendation Letters**

**brought to you by
Anica Vujnovic & Laura Mansfield**

Letter of Recommendation

Importance and impact on the application process

- Letters of Recommendation (LOR) are often provided by both a teacher and counselor as part of the university admissions process
- LORs help the university understand more about the applicant's personal attributes and academic accomplishments as well as assess how well the applicant meets admissions criteria
- LORs are essential to a student's university application – they cannot apply to a school without one!

Letter of Recommendation

Who should write it and what content should it contain?

- Who should write a LOR?
 - a) The teacher who gave the best grades
 - b) Photography or art teacher
 - c) A new teacher to the student
 - d) Science or math teacher
 - e) English/Spanish/Portuguese teachers

Letter of Recommendation

Who should write it and what content should it contain?

- Who should write a LOR?
 - a) The teacher who gave the best grades
 - b) Photography or art teacher
 - c) A new teacher to the student
 - d) Science or math teacher**
 - e) English/Spanish/Portuguese teachers**
- Any teacher – from more academically rigorous subjects – that knows the student well and can vouch for the student’s academic capabilities while providing personal details about the student should write an LOR
- A teacher can write the LOR in their native language and reach out to English teachers or others to help with translations

Letter of Recommendation

Who should write it and what content should it contain?

- What information should be included in a LOR?
 - How you know the applicant
 - The student's personality and character
 - Specific anecdotes about the student's intellectual curiosity
 - The student's involvement in class with specific examples about their participation
- LORs should NOT be generic, copy + paste jobs from previous LORs a teacher may have written!
- LORs MUST be personalized to the student – after all, your LOR is there to help the student get accepted!
- LORs MUST be written by the recommender! It's ok to meet with the student about the LOR, but the student cannot be the one to write it!

Letter of Recommendation

DOs and DON'Ts

DO

- Be as **specific as possible**, highlighting a student's major strengths and impressive personal qualities.
- **Show, don't tell.** Be demonstrative with **stories and examples**, rather than just descriptions.
- Be careful not to use phrases that could be interpreted negatively.
- Talk about personal challenges the student has **overcome**.
- **Give your vision** for how you see the student contributing to their college community.

DON'T

- **Copy and paste** from other letter.
- Use **generic**, ambiguous, or hyperbolic language.
- **Restate** everything on a student's resume.
- List **quantitative** data.
- Describe a student **without having examples** to illustrate your points.
- **Leave out essential insights** into the student's character or motivations.
- Go too long or too short (**1-2 pages is just right**).

Letter of Recommendation

Additional criteria

- LORs should NOT be tailored to one individual university – students typically apply to multiple schools, and the LOR can be used for more than just one university application!
- LORs are submitted electronically. Therefore it's important for teachers who submit their LOR to have a valid working e-mail address.
- If you don't feel comfortable submitting an LOR on a student's behalf – don't! You aren't required and it's important that the LOR comes from someone who can really attest to the student's capabilities.

Letter of Recommendation

Advice from universities

“...letters that are most helpful in our process are those which provide an **honest evaluation** of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate, **provide specific examples** to illustrate key points, and **portray the intellectual and personal qualities** that distinguish the student from the other top candidates applying to Dartmouth.” – Dartmouth Newsletter

“Please pay special attention to the opening and closing of your evaluation. **Remember, we are reading over 20,000 applications, and we appreciate strong statements that we’ll remember as we evaluate each candidate.** We are only looking for glowing superlatives **if they are backed up with examples and give us context**; what is behind a student’s achievements. Above all else, make sure to go beyond a student’s grades and academic performance. We can get this information from other parts of the application.” – MIT



Questions?

Letter of Recommendation

The good and the bad

“Brian was in the top five in my class consistently. He is certainly motivated to study. His character and personality are admirable. Brian is an excellent student, hard worker and has above average reasoning ability.”

What do you think of this LOR?

- Lacks concrete, substantive information and examples
- Comes across as low effort or there's not much else to say about the student
- Generic

Letter of Recommendation

The good and the bad

“Jen was a student in one of my predominately senior physics classes. She took physics her junior year in high school and was a good student. Through hard work, she was able to develop a good understanding of the subject material.

Jen also had personal qualities that are commendable. In the two years that I have known her I have never known her to be dishonest or untrustworthy. Once on an exam paper I had made a grading error in her favor. She brought this to my attention even though it resulted in a lower test grade.

In conclusion, I feel that Jen has both the academic and personal qualities to be a credit to the college of her choice, and I give her my recommendation without reservation.”

What do you think of this LOR?

- Better than Brian’s
- Is a very typical LOR that universities receive thousands of every year
- How does Jen compare with other students? Most students applying for university are also hard workers, honest and are good students → this letter doesn’t set Jen apart.

Letter of Recommendation

The good and the bad

"It is a great pleasure for me to recommend David for admission to MIT. He is one of the most extraordinary students I have encountered in 20 years of teaching. I taught David A.P. Calculus last year as a tenth grader, and he was one of the very top students in an extremely able group of mostly seniors. He has a high aptitude for math and was very much involved in his work, applying himself with persistence and dedication and often going beyond the regular class assignments.

David's abiding interest, however, is computer science. He has developed a series of "strands" for use in providing computerized drill and review in the basic skills and techniques of algebra and arithmetic and has recently adapted these to other subjects. David's work in this area has been so original and significant that he has published a paper on it and delivered several lectures to professionals in other parts of the country. This is a phenomenal accomplishment for anyone, especially a young man in rural Arkansas. It is also worth noting that both last year and this year David taught computer programming to a tenth-grade class of mine for two weeks. He took over completely, preparing lectures, assignments, and tests with great care and thought. His lectures were clear and well organized, and it was obvious that he had expended a great deal of effort to make the course the success that it was.

David's personal qualities are as impressive as his intellectual accomplishments. An extremely kind, sensitive and sensible boy, he has had a difficult family situation for a few years now. He provides emotional support to his mother through her battle with cancer without allowing the situation to undermine his own stability and accomplishments. He has exhausted all that we have to offer him in this small community, and the maturity that he has demonstrated leads me to believe him capable of entering college a year early, as he now plans to do. I sincerely hope that you will be able to offer him a place in MIT's freshman class."

What do you think of this LOR?



Thank you!

Do not be afraid to look us up on social
media of @acpodgorica

or e-mail:

podgorica@educationusa.org