

writing letters: one for every purpose

common types of formal letters that you will write as an academic

Trainee-centric

- graduate school applicants
- medical school applicants
- job applicants
- fellowship applicants
- nominations and awards

Project-centric

- grant applications
- some fellowship applications

Program-centric

- site visit
- stewardship review

Publication-centric

- manuscript submissions
- manuscript revisions

Advancement-centric

- staff promotion
- tenure advancement

Miscellaneous

- staff appreciation
- thank you
- visa and citizenship

Be prepared to write letters.

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your first step

Case Study #1

A colleague has approached you to write a letter of recommendation. You know the person. **But not great.** How do you respond?

Case Study #2

A colleague has approached you to write a letter of recommendation. You **do NOT know the person very well**– but they are in your community. How do you respond?

Case Study #3

A colleague has approached you to write a letter of recommendation. **You know the person REALLY well. And your opinion isn't superb.** How do you respond?

Case Study #4

A colleague has approached you to write a letter of recommendation. **You know the person REALLY well. And you have a great opinion.** How do you respond?

writing letters: ask for a candid conversation

you need to collect more information

even if you know everything there is to know about the candidate's current situation, work ethic, and past successes, you still don't have all the information you need.

writing letters: ask for a candid conversation

you need to collect more information

do your homework

- What can you tell me about the position or company you're applying for?
- Is there a specific time, project, or trait you'd like me to feature?
- Who should the letter be addressed to and what can you tell me about this person?
- Why did you think of me for this letter?

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follow a formula

a general formula

- Explain your relationship
- Evaluate the candidate... give specifics to back up your impressions
- Tell a detailed story
- Make a comparison to seal the deal... attempt to be quantitative
- Provide honest and candid reflections

You may be asked to write 10-50 or *more* letters a year.
Make it easy on yourself.

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Hands-on session

A laptop computer is shown from a three-quarter perspective, slightly open. The screen displays a hand-drawn illustration of a landscape with rolling hills and a blue sky. The text "please pull out your laptops" is overlaid on the screen in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

please pull out your laptops

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where to learn more

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02186-8>

<https://mitadmissions.org/apply/parents-educators/writingrecs/>

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-write-a-grad-school-recommendation-letter>