

WRITING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION



LETTER STRUCTURE

- Explain how you know the applicant, what your role was, and if you observed them directly or not. Keep this section brief with the focus on the applicant!
- Emphasize behaviors you observed that match the skills needed for the position or program. It might include communication skills, content knowledge, or critical thinking. What competencies does the applicant have?
- Share evidence and examples that support your statements.

KEEP THESE CONSISTENT ACROSS LETTERS



- **Length** - ensure your letters are of equal length across different demographics (e.g. gender, race, experience)
- **Consider if an anecdote or information is private or sensitive** - ask permission before you share it. This could include academic information (GPA, class grades, and test scores etc.) or personal information (socioeconomic status, country of origin, first generation status, etc.). Consider using a standardized questionnaire when an applicant requests a letter from you
- **Provide context** - if you are comparing the applicant to others, explain how they compare to peers and keep it relevant to the position or program. *Example: Students you have supervised, previous co-workers, students in a class you taught*

AVOID STEREOTYPES AND BIAS

- **Consider adjectives used and descriptions of personal life** - do they reinforce stereotypes or biases, and are superlatives used consistently across applicants? Is the emphasis on effort or ability
 - Instead of, "She is hard working" or "He is friendly"
 - Consider, "She is capable" or "He takes initiative"
- **Avoid back-handed compliments** - keep the tone professional, highlighting accomplishments and observations of skills related to the recommendation. Be honest and stay positive, without unnecessarily raising doubt or being tentative
 - Instead of, "She has never been unprofessional" or "He required only minimal supervision"
 - Consider, "She always maintained professionalism" or "He demonstrated excellent skill"
- **Don't delay** - leave enough time to gather applicant information and proofread the letter before submitting



RESOURCES & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Gender bias calculator - copy and paste your letter [here](#) for a count of "female-" vs "male-associated words."

Please note: Different applicants and positions may have different word associations. The goal is to determine if those words are appropriate, or if words demonstrating agency and ability are more relevant.

Consider the length: Check if your letters for different applicants are similar in length, use "standout adjectives," and grindstone vs ability language.

Article: "A Linguistic Comparison of Letters of Recommendation for Male and Female Chemistry and Biochemistry Job Applicants" [Schmader et al, 2007](#)

Association of American Medical Colleges: [Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant.](#)

Asefaw Berhe and Kim. University of California, Merced: [Infographic](#)

Rochester Institute of Technology: [Advance RIT Website](#) and [Infographic](#)

The University of Arizona Commission on the Status of Women: [Infographic](#)

