

USEFUL INFORMATION

THE LETTER OF
RECOMMENDATION
REQUESTING COMPILING
AND
WRITING TIPS

COMPILED BY
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The Letter of Recommendation

INTRODUCTION

Letters of recommendation provide information from a former employer or a credible associate who has been personally involved with the candidate. This outside source provides a valuable record of the candidate's previous experience and can testify to his or her skills and abilities. You will usually write a *letter of recommendation* when you know who the specific employer is and what the position will be. In your letter you address a person's qualifications with that position and that employer in mind.

Recommendation Letters provide information that shows the applicant matches the prospective employer's expectations and requirements. The letter also provides an opportunity for an applicant to be seen as an individual, and helps him or her to stand out from the other applicants. It is important that you as the person providing the recommendation have a good understanding of the candidate's academic/professional history, aptitudes, interests, goals, and direction.

- Be honest about your feelings, intentions, and concerns. This will save time and embarrassment for both parties if you feel that you cannot provide a good recommendation.
- If you are not sure what to write, ask the requester to provide a draft letter for you to review, finalize, and sign.
- Find out when the requestor needs the letter and be sensitive to deadlines. Put yourself in the reader's position and consider what you would want to know if you were reading the letter.

An effective letter of recommendation:

- **verifies experience**
- **confirms competence**
- **builds credibility**
- **bolsters confidence**

Two distinct categories of Recommendation letters are common.

- Letters of recommendation from employers, work associates, co-workers or peers may contain evidence or confirmation of some of the following:

- **Previous positions held in the company**
- **Summary of job responsibilities**
- **Strengths, skills, and talents**
- **Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.**
- **Ability to work with a team**
- **Ability to work independently**

- Academic letters of recommendation or letters to academic or research institutes may contain evidence or confirmation of the following:

- **Academic performance**
- **Honors and awards**
- **Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.**

Willingness to follow school policy

Ability to work with others

Ability to work independently

Reference letters that combine these two traits are used when the recipient is a research or academic institution and the candidate is applying for research positions.

Before writing this letter be sure to determine your company's or institution's policy regarding letters of recommendation. Some policies exist as protection against potential lawsuits. If you write a letter, stick to the facts, avoiding personal or derogatory statements. Give only complimentary opinions. Do not include comments about race, color, religion, handicap, sex, national origin, marital status, or parental status.

REQUESTING FOR REFERENCE LETTER

CHOOSING THE LETTER WRITER

Choose who will represent you wisely. No one person can represent you accurately in all areas. Find someone who knows your strengths in the areas you need to satisfy the requirements of a particular employer or admissions board. If more than one recommendation is being sought, choose a range of associates or peers who can represent a different aspect of your personality.

When you request a recommendation, communicate your needs in a straightforward way. Explain what you are applying for and ask if the person can provide you with a good recommendation. If someone exhibits any uneasiness about providing you with a strong recommendation, be polite, thank him or her for their time and then look elsewhere. Choose someone who:

- can provide a well-written letter**
- knows you well enough to be credible**
- thinks highly of you and your abilities**
- holds a respected position**

Keep in mind that the recommender is doing you a favor and has a busy schedule with other commitments. Make sure you allow enough time and information so that he or she can provide you with a well-written and effective letter

Schedule a convenient time for you and your employer, advisor or referee to meet or communicate. Review the requirements and expectations of the recommendation letter. This process helps the person who is writing the letter ask or answer questions, clarify points that may need elaboration, and point out additional information that may be required from you. Make this process easy by providing all of the information needed so that you can obtain an accurate and positive recommendation.

GOOD RECOMMENDATION REQUEST

1. Give them the exact name of the person or organization to whom/which the letter will go, and the complete mailing address, as well as the date by which the letter must be received.
2. Explain to your referee what you are applying for, what the requirements are, and how you meet these requirements. Provide a copy of your application letter and résumé: do

not assume that referees will know *all* of your background information or the details of what you are applying for! The more your referee knows about you and what you are applying for, the more s/he will be able to produce a contextualized letter which supports you and your qualifications most effectively. The reverse is equally true, and often disastrous for unwary applicants.

3. Tell your referee if there are particular qualities or abilities you would like him/her to cover in the letter — your ability to interpret, ability to translate, language combinations or specializations, ability to work with others, experience in living and working abroad, etc. This is not "telling the referee 'what to say,'" but clarifying points that must be supported in your application on which the referee is qualified to comment.
4. Make sure the referee knows and uses your name, address, and other details as they appear on your application and résumé. If there are "differences," explain them!
5. If some time has passed (months . . . years?) since you have last physically met and spoken with your referee, it would be a very good idea to meet him or her personally when requesting the recommendation (or at minimum, telephone to ask). Do not assume that referees will have a clear memory of you if substantial time has passed since your last contact; they in turn would like the opportunity to learn how you have developed since then, refresh their knowledge of your spoken English, etc. In cases like this, simply e-mailing your request and documents to them is not enough.

Be prepared to submit a draft recommendation letter if requested by the referee.

WRITING YOUR OWN LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Do not be surprised if a person you are asking for a recommendation asks you to write a first draft of the letter that he or she will then modify and sign. Begin by providing an accurate assessment of your strengths without dwelling on limitations. Letters of recommendation are intended to be positive and realistic evaluations of performance, competence, and capability. Do not be shy in communicating your strengths. Look at the following suggestions:

- List your strengths, talents, and abilities. These may include diligence, punctuality, leadership, reliability, enthusiasm, creativity, independence, teamwork, organization, etc.
- Highlight your strengths and accomplishments without bragging.
- Choose several of your qualities and strengths that match the current situation; do not list everything you have ever done.
- **Use a professional vocabulary and style; write as if you were the employer/ referee providing the letter.**

It is not unfavorable to inform the referee that a draft recommendation is prepared by you. However, do not submit it unless asked for.

RECOMMENDATION LETTER

When writing recommendation letters for others, always include the following points:

- The exact name of the person you are writing about, and why you are writing.
- How long and in what capacity you have known the person. If necessary verify the academic and professional claims made by the applicant.

- Deal with each specific aspect of the candidate from the most relevant trait for the job to the less relevant. Convey your impression and how you judge it. Highlight how the trait is important for the employer.
- In what sense you are recommending the person — job ability, education, personality, language skill, aptitude, core-strengths ... Academic performance, Honors and awards, Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc. Ability to work with others, Ability to work independently
- An explicit sentence (or two) with the nature of the recommendation — positive, "cautious" ...? Do not hesitate to express exemplary qualities and if done, state why you consider so by suitable qualifiers.
- An ending which mentions that you would be willing to supply further information if so desired ... (this is common, though not essential).
- Finally, keep a copy of the letter. It is a "legal document" which reflects upon you and your reputation as well as the person you are recommending.

CLASSICAL STYLE

IT IS TYPICALLY A 1-2 PAGE TEXT DOCUMENT

Letters of recommendation may be written in a classic format that includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. There may also be specific requirements for certain letters that you may need to follow. In most cases, however, any well-organized format will be acceptable. Look at the following sample format:

Header

Introduce the applicant with full correct name and position applied for.

Introduction

Introduce yourself as the recommender. State your position, how you know the applicant, length of your relationship, and any other pertinent information to build your credibility.

Provide an overview of your general impressions of the applicant.

Body

Cover one exceptional quality of the applicant in each paragraph

Use specific examples to show how you observed each quality

Address qualities in order of importance

Keep the body of the letter to two or three paragraphs

Conclusion

Confirm that the applicant would be a desirable employee, adding any other comments you feel appropriate.

Encourage the reader to contact you for additional information or with any questions.

Don't forget to personally sign the letter.

STYLISTIC POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING THE RECOMMENDATION:

1. In English style, mention the full name of the person in the first paragraph, but thereafter mainly refer to the person's last name (assuming it is a formal letter, and you are not referring to the person by his/her first name). Do not continuously repeat the person's full name.
2. Make sure you have the appropriate perspective! You must write about the person from the perspective of how he/she will be able to satisfy the employer's requirements for the job, rather than how much the person might "need" the job or "enjoy it" or "benefit from the job." Always consider carefully the sensibilities of those who will be reading your letter. Highlight on what the applied job requires from the applicant, and how much the person meets or exceeds such a requirement.
3. Keep this perspective when describing the person's qualifications as well. You can say things like "She is well qualified for the job." You cannot say things like "She is the best person for the job" — you have no idea who else is applying, what their qualifications are, or precisely what the employer is looking for, and therefore are in no position to make such claims.
4. Use objective, professional-sounding descriptions. Where possible, put the subject's qualifications into a comparative perspective. Do not use language that is inflated (e.g. great or fantastic) or which suggests a level of qualification that is not credible for either your or the subject's age or experience or the context in which you know the subject.
5. If after all the person's qualifications are so good that they may seem "too good to be true," then adding a "qualifier" to your recommendation can restore credibility. This could be a sentence indicating that you are aware that your recommendation may sound "uncritical," and assuring the reader by putting this into context that the applicant really is as good as you have been saying. Something like the following is typical:

"I realize that the description I have given for Ms. Smith may sound unusually good for her age and experience. However, in my 15 years of teaching, she has been one of the top two students I have ever had. Thus I feel she would be an excellent candidate for the grant even in preference to older students with more formal qualifications."

There are numerous possible variations on this. However, such a 'qualifier' should not be used casually; it is justified only if you have described the person's qualifications as **exceptionally** good.

STRUCTURED STYLE

It uses a template or a specific order of themes to build a reference letter. Some companies have specific form for seeking references. For issuing academic reference letters MS-Word templates are commonly used in mixing fonts and emphasis in organized way for structured reference letters. General structure of reference letter is:

Title: Referee's name, Title, Institutional affiliation, address, telephone, fax, email and date

Header: A line or text paragraph stating it is letter of recommendation for "applicant's full-name" and the "position applied for"

Introduction: Mention how, how long and in what relationships the applicant and his work is familiar to the referee. Conclude with a phrase stating the general impression.

*Verify: **If necessary**, especially for young applicants, verify their claims of education and or employment. It is possible to verify qualities in a tabular entry or as unstructured text. Verification may include:*

Legal verification – covering: a) Conviction in a crime, b) Abuse of drugs or alcohol, c) Child neglect or abuse, d) Other unlawful activities.

Academic verification- covering: a) Academic credentials, b) Awards, c) Merit, d) Curricular and Extra-curricular achievements

Professional verification – covering: a) Employment record, b) Use and abuse of authority, c) Integrity, d) Safety record at work, e) Inter-personal relations, f) discrimination against race or sex, g) Misconduct, h) Achievements, i) Responsibilities, j) Growth records, k) Recognitions etc

While the above three aspects are not mandatory for all reference letters, it is worthwhile to include the following verification in many instances.

Attitude & Personality verification – covering: a) Participative skills, b) Maturity, c) Imaginativeness, d) Work ethics, e) Team playing, f) Seeking and accepting responsibility, g) Dependability, h) Leadership, i) Stress Management, j) Positive attitude, k) Commitment, l) Quality consciousness, m) Goal orientation, n) Persuasiveness, o) Tolerance, p) Morality, q) Acceptance, r) Ability to work independently and in a team, s) Skills as a trouble-shooter, t) Tactfulness, u) Understanding situations and people, v) Virtue, w) Respectability etc.

As these verifiable qualities are many, focus on what is most impressive in the candidate and is most relevant to the position applied for.

Highlights: Summarize the best qualities and performance of the candidate which you have observed and is considered relevant to the position applied for. State clearly, how these qualities will impact at the new position. If you are considering using excellence qualifiers, do them with clear justification.

Recommendation: Final word of what you recommend about the candidate. It needs to be straight forward and succinct.

Final Word: Offer to provide clarifications or more information in written or orally if needed, if possible. Leave a final phrase on the candidate as a final word.

Signature: Never forget to sign in person and retain a copy.

EXAMPLES

XYZ Technologies, Inc.
123 XYZ Way • New York City • NY • 12345
(123) 555-0000 • Fax (123) 555-0001

February 1, 2000

To Whom it May Concern:

Scott Smith worked for me at XYZ Technologies for three years, as a senior technical instructor. I am writing this letter to confirm that his recent layoff from XYZ was not in any way tied to his performance, and to highly recommend him as an employee with your organization.

Had I been given the choice, I would not have laid Scott off. But it was not my decision to make. XYZ decided to withdraw from the PC market, balance expenses with the anticipated reduction in sales revenue, and hire a consulting firm to evaluate long-term staffing needs. As a result, XYZ drastically reduced the size of its workforce by dissolving the entire PC division, including the technical training department. Unfortunately, this major reorganization left no other position open for Scott. We regretfully had to let him go.

Scott is a conscientious, highly-skilled technical instructor, worthy of at least a senior or management position. He has keen insight into the learning process, and is an expert in needs analysis, project management, course development, and classroom instruction. Scott's in-depth product knowledge, unique instructional techniques, and excellent people skills have consistently received rave reviews from his students. Should conditions at XYZ change, I wouldn't hesitate to hire him back.

If you would like to speak to me about Scott's skills, talents and work habits, feel free to call (123) 555-0002 or page me by dialing (123) 555-0003.

Sincerely,

Mary Doe

Mary Doe
Vice President, Technical Services
mdoe@xyztech.com

XYZ Company
123 XYZ Way • New York City • NY • 12345
(123) 555-0000 • Fax (123) 555-0001

February 1, 2000

To Whom it May Concern:

I've been Holly Smith's manager for over six years. While I wish her only the best and fully understand that she must advance her career, I'm truly sorry to see her go. It has been a pleasure having her on my team.

Holly is a professional technical writer of the highest caliber, who meticulously researches, formats, edits and proofs her documents. I've received many compliments from customers who rely on Holly's documentation. Management and personnel in tech support, engineering, technical training, and other departments praise her work.

Holly is an innovative self-starter, who rarely needs supervision. She is punctual and typically exceeds expectations. She handles pressure well, and will voluntarily work overtime and take work home to meet a deadline. For example, we received a rush order from one of our customers for a complex product modification, including critical user documentation. Holly not only made the extremely tight deadline, but beat it; yet she still produced a stellar, technically-accurate addendum for the standard user manual. Sales, marketing, training and engineering were quite pleased with Holly's performance in this crunch. Even our CEO was impressed, and our customer was ecstatic. This is just one example among many of Holly's superior skills and admirable work ethics.

Holly is an invaluable asset to any technical communications department, and I highly recommend hiring her. If you'd like to discuss her attributes in more detail, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

John Doe

John Doe
Manager, Technical Communications
Ext. 245, jdoe@xyzco.com

XYZ Engineering
123 XYZ Way • New York City • NY • 12345
(123) 555-0000 • Fax (123) 555-0001

February 1, 2000

To Whom it May Concern:

I've been Michael Smith's manager at XYZ Engineering for almost four years. It was my pleasure to promote Michael to mechanical engineer II last year, because he consistently meets and often exceeds his job requirements.

Michael is an enthusiastic, dedicated employee with reliable work habits. He often does not need guidance or supervision, but willingly accepts it when offered. He is consistently successful in improving his skills, and he works hard to do so.

Michael is always willing to pitch in to help the team, and he gets the job done right the first time. He is efficient in planning projects, punctual in meeting deadlines, and conscientiously adheres to company standards and guidelines.

You'd be hard pressed to find an employee more dedicated than Michael, and I recommend him as a rock-solid addition to your engineering staff. If you'd like more information, I'd be happy to provide it. Please call the phone number above and ask for me by name.

Sincerely,

John Doe

John Doe
Manager, Mechanical Engineering
jdoe@xyzengineering.com



XYZ Engineering

123 XYZ Way • New York City • NY • 12345
(123) 555-0000 • Fax (123) 555-0001

DR. G. SRIKANTH

Manager (IT)

June 3, 1996

Letter of reference

This is to verify that Matuza K Joseph was an employee of the XYZ Engineering from August 3, 1982 to Oct. 28, 1994. As programmer and Systems Analyst(IT), he was a major player in the development of many critical information systems. I had association of Matuza since he joined the company as his peer and reviewer. He had been working under my supervision for the last 4 years of his tenure with XYZ.

During his tenure, he provided technical support to system accounting package and seismic data processing package. He installed application development software and made significant contributions to the company through the following projects : a translator for VAX FORTRAN to IBM FORTRAN; Reel Information System, which keeps track of information regarding magnetic tape volumes recorded during seismic surveys; Library Information System; Personnel Information System; Job Selection Decision Support system, which decides release of batch jobs based on their resource requirements; Material management information system to replace a batch stores data processing system. Besides the above he has worked on a number of small and large projects.

During his tenure at the XYZ Engineering, Matuza used the following skill set : IBM 3090, IBM 3083, IBM 370 main-frame computers; MVS/XA, MVS/ESA operating systems; JES2, JCL, TSO/E, Clists, REXX, ISPF, VSAM, DB2, CICS, IMS DB, COBOL II, Assembler, COBOL VS, FORTRAN, PASCAL; and system management and productivity tools such as ADW, Xpediter, Intertest, FileAid, AbendAid.

Matuza has displayed keen analytical skills and program development capabilities. I wish him all the best in his future endeavor.

Dr. G. Srikanth.

Manager (IT)

TEMPLATES

[Writer's Name or Company Letterhead]
[Street • City • State • Zip Code]
[Phone # • Fax phone # • Messages phone # • Email]

[Date today]

[Recipient's address block - optional]
[Address]
[Address]

Subject: Letter of Recommendation to Mr.ABC for the position of Chief Designer in the design department of PQR Engineering.

Dear [Recipient's name] or To Whom it May Concern:

[First and foremost, if you don't feel comfortable writing a letter of recommendation, don't. A vague or fabricated recommendation letter might do more harm than good. Start by identifying your relationship with the person for whom you're writing the letter. Are you the person's manager, co-worker or professor? How long have you known or worked with the person?]

[Picture the person in his or her job role. Point out a variety of positive traits while focusing on work ethics, accomplishments, skills, and significant contributions (use specific examples). If you draw a blank, ask the person to refresh your memory. If you have access to the person's merit reviews, refer to them for hints. If for business reasons you're sorry to see this person go, say so. Avoid vague, powerless words such as *nice, good, fine* and *reasonable*. Use words such as *excellent, superior, instrumental, creative, innovative, efficient, dependable, articulate, meticulous, self-starter* and *confident*.]

[Wrap it up with a recommendation to hire. Close by offering to provide more information. Include your contact information if it's not in the letterhead.]

Sincerely,

[Sign here]

[Your name]
[Your title]

cc [Names for copies - optional]



C O M P A N Y N A M E H E R E

Date.

[Click **here** and type recipient's address]

Letter of Recommendation to candidate-name and position applied for

Dear Sir or Madam or address by name:

[Introduce your association with the candidate. State what aspects of the candidate you had observed and giving reference for.]

[Mention your understanding of the job being applied to and the overall perspective of the candidate for the job responsibility]

[Verify or deliberate on core competencies of the candidate with reference to the job applied for. Deal with a cohesive set of competencies in a paragraph. Consider the most important for the job and the one assessed as best in the candidate. Typically 3-6 such qualities are referenced in a letter of recommendation. Use objective and professional sounding descriptions]

[If the application is for a senior position dwell on issues like integrity, dependability and accommodation potential of the candidate]

[Point to highlights of the candidate within the job perspective]

[Recommendation. Make a clear succinct and unambiguous recommendation. Make a concluding phrase of your judgment of the candidate]

[Open avenues for seeking any additional information]

Sincerely,

[Click **here** and type your name]

[Click **here** and type job title]

C O M P A N Y A D D R E S S

P H O N E N U M B E R S

F A X N U M B E R S

E M A I L