Academic Letters of Recommendation in the College Admissions Process

NACAC

Application Components

- Application form
- Transcripts
- Testing (SAT/ACT)
- ***Counselor letter and school profile***
- ***Teacher letter***
- Essays
- Interview / other components

Application Areas of Review

- Academic Character
- Extracurricular activities/engagements
- Personal qualities and fit

Academic Character

- Classroom contributions
- Collaboration
- Quality of work
- Intellectual curiosity

Extracurricular Engagement

- How is the student involved in the larger school community?
- Does the student have a track record of making an impact or taking initiative?
- How does the student balance competing academic and non-academic responsibilities?

Counselor Recommendation & School Profile

Counselor Letters

- Highlight any special programs (academic or extracurricular)
- How prominent are activities/impact in school?
- Any family or personal context we should be aware of?
- Context for student and entire graduating class

Personal Qualities & Contributions

- How does the student engage with others?
- Will this student make the most out of their opportunities?
- How do they respond to setbacks? Is there a history of self-advocacy?

Where do we get this information?

- Student questionnaire
- Parent questionnaire
- Student resume
- School Newsletter
- Other people (teachers, coaches, students)

Counselor Recommendation

Despite her 5’0” stature, Julia loves the sport of volleyball. She’s played the game since middle school and was elated when she earned a spot on Padua’s freshman team. Unfortunately for Julia, Padua’s volleyball program is loaded with talent, often sending players to all three collegiate levels. Julia was cut in her sophomore year. There’s a phrase in sports that states “Nothing is worse than being told you can’t play the game you love”. Well, that happened to Julia. She was crushed. Her pain didn’t last too long as she found other leagues to play in. She plays with her parish team during the winter months in a high school league and goes to the local YMCA faithfully three times per week to play in the adult league. After seeing this 15 year old play once, the YMCA allowed Julia to play in this coed adult league, the only player under 18 allowed in the league. I truly believe that getting cut from our volleyball team made her a better athlete. She’s learn to battle with volleyball players (almost) twice her size and refuses to back down. Julia has earned a tremendous amount of respect in the adult league! In addition, Julia has taken up running. She’s run in many 5K races (often fundraising events) and just this year completed her first half marathon. It sounds odd but had she made our volleyball team, I don’t think she would be as motivated as she is today. Julia quickly learned to not allow others to dictate her success.

School Profiles

- Demographic information about school community
- General testing trends
- Classes offered (rigor and special programs)
- Extracurricular culture and activities
- Grade distributions
- Easy to read!

Teacher Recommendations

Teacher LORs:
How They Are Used

- Provide insight into a student's academic character
- Expand on current and past successes and challenges
- Understand a student's personal qualities and potential contributions in a college classroom
- Illustrate how a student matches with an institution's culture
- Shed light on aspects not seen elsewhere, including qualitative skills

Teacher Recommendation

It is with great pleasure that I recommend Jane Testudo to your prestigious institution. I have had the privilege of getting to know Jane over the last three years as her World History and Psychology teacher.

Over the past three years I have watched Jane grow from a passive student in class as a freshman into the leader I relied on to start many of the discussions as a senior.

Knowing that she is a born leader, I pushed Jane to know her own human potential. After talking with many of Jane's teachers, I have come to understand that she is hardworking in the classroom and that she has begun to openly participate. I think she has really learned about herself and has opened up towards other people.

I would not hesitate to recommend Jane Testudo; she will continue to grow and challenge her comfort zone. If given the chance, I know that she will not fail to live up to her potential.

Teacher Recommendation

It is with great pleasure that I recommend James “Jimmy” Diamondback to your prestigious institution. I have had the privilege of getting to know Jimmy over the last three years as his World History and Psychology teacher.

Over the past three years I have watched Jimmy grow from a passive student in class as a freshman into the leader I relied on to start many of the discussions as a senior.

Knowing that he is a born leader, I pushed Jimmy to know his own human potential. After talking with many of Jimmy’s teachers, I have come to understand that he is hardworking in the classroom and that he has begun to openly participate. I think he has really learned about himself and has opened up towards other people.

I would not hesitate to recommend Jimmy Diamondback; he will continue to grow and challenge his comfort zone. If given the chance, I know that he will not fail to live up to his potential.

Teacher Recommendation

It is with great pleasure that I recommend James “Jimmy” Diamondback to your prestigious institution. I have had the privilege of getting to know Jimmy over the last three years as his World History and Psychology teacher.

Over the past three years I have watched Jimmy grow from a passive student in class as a freshman into the leader I relied on to start many of the discussions as a senior.

Knowing that he is a born leader, I pushed Jimmy to know his own human potential. After talking with many of Jimmy’s teachers, I have come to understand that he is hardworking in the classroom and that he has begun to openly participate. I think he has really learned about himself and has opened up towards other people.

I would not hesitate to recommend Jimmy Diamondback; he will continue to grow and challenge his comfort zone. If given the chance, I know that he will not fail to live up to his potential.

Effective Letters:

- Provide a **brief** introduction of the class for context
- Outline academic performance
- Highlight distinguishing performance
- Avoid clichés (quiet leader, best in my career, etc.)
- Are specific and use examples

Best LORs Come From Teachers Who:

- Know the student well (academically)
- Can provide anecdotes of academic growth
- Can speak to work ethic and self-advocacy
- Can provide insights into the student's potential in a college classroom environment

Things To Be Mindful Of:

- Quality over quantity
- Faculty bio is not relevant
- Unnecessary to list non-academic activities
- Avoid clichés—give specific examples
- Templates frequently lead to mistakes
- **Bullet points are fine**

Common Generalizations

- “Would want my son/daughter to be like him/her”
- “Quiet Leader”
- “I learn from him/her”
- “He/She makes me a better teacher”
- “Respected by peers and faculty”
- “Not your typical…”
- “Has a thirst for knowledge”
- *You can use these, but it’s not going to distinguish a student without supporting evidence*

Recap: Components Of An Effective Letter

- Should address distinguishing aspects of the student
- How do they participate in the academic environment?
- How do they respond to challenges?
- How do they respond when they are interested/curious about something?
- How do they work with others?

You can use these, but it's not going to distinguish a student without supporting evidence