

## Nate's thoughts on Letters of Recommendation

### Accepting the request to write a letter

- They certainly know how to ask at the worst times. But,
- What do students hear if you ask "are you sure I'm the right person to be asking?"
- How do colleagues feel when the student says, "I know x professor better, but they wouldn't do it."

### Things to request from the student to make writing the letter easier

- Due date (it must be reasonable)
- Make sure you know it's a letter and not a web form
- Url to program
- Test scores
- Their resume
- Personal statements or related materials they will be submitting
- Who to address the letter to and where to send it
- Key things about the program, job, etc. (to customize the letter and show your attention to their organization)
  
- If multiple letters are needed, an excel sheet containing all of the above
  
- If necessary an interview to give you more talking points (see soft skills at end).

### Interview questions

- What were your proudest moments in my classes?
- What about other classes?
- Around campus? Community?
- What about this specific university/fellowship/job appeals to you?
  - o How has your time with me helped you become competitive for above?
- Perhaps walk through the soft skills list (attached) and ask them to ID specific things and describe.
- Of courses more pointed questions about their preparation for xx program/position.

### How to structure the letter (at least how I tend to do it)

- Like an essay.
  - o Intro
    - a thesis "I am writing to enthusiastically recommend..."
    - a key take away or two "She is among the top xx% of students I have encountered in my xx years of teaching at Austin College."

- Say something smart where they are applying. “The chance for her to study with xx...” And make sure it doesn’t feel like a form.
  - organization “In this letter I am going to focus on Mary’s strengths in xx, xx, and as a xx.
- Body
  - Follow through on organization.
    - Classroom student, teaching assistant, in the community, around campus, etc.
  - Don’t qualify praise, proofread for gender/race/pronoun usage
  - Gracefully incorporate the context of learning here if relevant.
- Conclusion
  - “I issue this recommendation without reservation. It has been my privilege over the years to get to really know the fine work that... If I can be of further help please do not hesitate to contact me.”

### Legal Considerations

- Are you actually writing a purposefully negative letter for an AC student?
- There is exposure to liability in letter writing
  - From both the applicant and the organization.
- Do they have access to the letter? You must assume they do.
- Defamation
  - Defenses to defamation include primarily “truth of statement” (is it true) and “qualified privilege” (do you not have “actual malice” towards the person).”
  - Intemperate language can remove qualified privilege.
- If the applicant is known to be dangerous and it is not disclosed in a letter, and it’s clear the writer knew, (sexual assault, brought a gun to work, other dangerous thing), that can open you to liability from 3<sup>rd</sup> party.
- Be very careful in terms of discriminating on a protected category.
- Do not write a letter unless the student asks. That would be a FERPA violation.
- Things to do:
  - Be honest
  - Be temperate in language
  - I would ask up through dean, etc. if I knew about a danger issue.
  - Be very careful about discriminating
  - Make sure you have an email from the student asking.
  - Be specific in who you address the letter and for what purpose.
- I’m happy to own liability insurance from AAUP.

### Should you share letters with students?

- What are you trying to prove to them and why?
- Do you show letters to all students you write for?

- In not, which ones receive this special thing?

## Soft Skills

Doyle, Alison. 2021 "Top Soft Skills Employers Value with Examples." thebalancecareers.com.

### Communication

- Listening
- Negotiation
- Nonverbal communication
- Persuasion
- Presentation
- Public speaking
- Reading body language
- Social skills
- Storytelling
- Verbal communication
- Visual communication
- Writing reports and proposals
- Writing skills

### Critical Thinking

- Adaptability
- Artistic aptitude
- Creativity
- Critical observation
- Critical thinking
- Design aptitude
- Desire to learn
- Flexibility
- Innovation
- Logical thinking
- Problem solving
- Research
- Resourcefulness
- Thinking outside the box
- Tolerance of change and uncertainty
- Troubleshooting
- Value education
- Willingness to learn

### Leadership

- Conflict management
- Conflict resolution
- Deal making
- Decision making
- Delegation
- Dispute resolution
- Facilitation
- Giving clear feedback

- Inspiring people
- Leadership
- Management
- Managing difficult conversations
- Managing remote/virtual teams
- Meeting management
- Mentoring
- Motivating
- Project management
- Resolving issues
- Successful coaching
- Supervising
- Talent management

### Positive Attitude

- Confidence
- Cooperation
- Courtesy
- Energy
- Enthusiasm
- Friendliness
- Honesty
- Humorous
- Patience
- Respectability
- Respectfulness

### Teamwork

- Accepting feedback
- Collaboration
- Customer service
- Dealing with difficult situations
- Dealing with office politics
- Disability awareness
- Diversity awareness
- Emotional intelligence
- Empathy
- Establishing interpersonal relationships
- Dealing with difficult personalities
- Intercultural competence
- Interpersonal skills
- Influence
- Networking
- Persuasion
- Self-awareness
- Selling skills
- Social skills
- Team building
- Teamwork

## Work Ethic

- Attentiveness
- Business ethics
- Competitiveness
- Dedication
- Dependability
- Following direction
- Independence
- Meeting deadlines
- Motivation
- Multitasking
- Organization
- Perseverance
- Persistence
- Planning
- Proper business etiquette
- Punctuality
- Reliability
- Resilience
- Results-oriented
- Scheduling
- Self-directed
- Self-monitoring
- Self-supervising
- Staying on task
- Strategic planning
- Time management
- Trainability
- Working well under pressure

### More Soft Skills

- Assertiveness
- Business ethics
- Business storytelling
- Business trend awareness
- Customer service
- Effective communicator
- Emotion management
- Ergonomic sensitivity
- Follow instructions
- Follow regulations
- Follow rules
- Functions well under pressure
- Good attitude
- Highly recommended
- Independent
- Interviewing
- Knowledge management
- Meets deadlines
- Motivating
- Perform effectively in a deadline environment

- Performance management
- Positive work ethic
- Problem solving
- Process improvement
- Quick-witted
- Results oriented
- Safety conscious
- Scheduling
- Self-awareness
- Self-supervising
- Stress management
- Team player
- Technology savvy
- Technology trend awareness
- Tolerant
- Trainable
- Training
- Troubleshooting
- Willing to accept feedback
- Willingness to learn
- Work-life balance
- Works well under pressure