



Letters of Recommendation:

Write a Cover Letter to Your Recommenders

Following up with the teachers and others who have agreed to write you a letter of recommendation is another opportunity: you can lay out exactly what you'd like them to focus on in their letter, and demonstrate your courtesy and professionalism in the process. The idea is both to impress them, making them your most powerful advocates, and to give them the ammunition they need to make a convincing case for why you would be a great member of the college community.

Dear [MS./MR. RECOMMENDER],

PART 1: Thank the recommender, and refresh his/her memory on the context of writing this letter. Remind her/him how many applications you'll submit, and that a detailed recommendation from a mentor could really set your personality and accomplishments apart from the competition.

PART 2: Sketch out a narrative of your work. In the case of teachers, feel free to remind them of struggles you worked through as well as accomplishments you had in their class. (Also, if there were personal circumstances outside of class that affected your academic performance, they'd be worth mentioning.) If you had personal exchanges outside of the classroom environment that would have given them a better sense of you individually, bring it up here. For counselors and others who have had more of a bird's eye view on your development over four years, choose some of your most recent accomplishments, and name how they have impacted what you're looking for during your college experience.

PART 3: Take a broader view. How did the things you learned in a particular class help you outside of that classroom environment? What role did your teacher have in inspiring your biggest interests? For counselors who have known you for multiple years, how did you mature over the course of your four years? If things started out a little slowly in freshman year, when did they pick up? What insights did you gain about your personal strengths and obstacles? How did your priorities shift among your activities, both academic and extracurricular?

CLOSING: Reiterate your appreciation. Explain what other items you're submitting with the cover letter (brag sheet, list of schools you're applying to with corresponding deadlines, high school resume with your extracurricular activities). Offer to bring your recommender anything else that might be helpful.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]



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Sample Cover Letter to Recommenders

August 25, 2015

Dear Mr. Setlich,

Thank you again for your willingness to write me a letter of recommendation. As you are aware, I am in the process of applying to eight colleges that require evaluations from teachers as part of the application process. I realize that it is an important opportunity for the colleges to get a better sense of who I am (aside from grades, classes, test scores, etc.), and so my hope is that your letter can be as detailed and personal as possible.

Over last year, my appreciation for the history of the Middle East changed dramatically. Our unit on comparing different models of democracy (the United States vs. Israel, for example) completely changed the way I see the campaign to spread democracy across the countries of the Middle East, given how different their religious, economic, and social backgrounds are from ours. The email exchanges that you and I had about the war in Afghanistan have also inspired me to look into colleges that offer Arabic, as well as cross-disciplinary “PPE” programs that combine the perspectives of politics, philosophy, and economics. I recognize how important one-on-one relationships are with mentors, and so I am also seeking opportunities for undergraduate research as well as programs that involve independent study and possibly travel with professors.

My presentation to the class on the damage done by a “one-size-fits-all” approach to installing democracy pushed me to do more extensive research than I had ever done previously, and for the first time I was finding my own reading outside of the classroom curriculum. I am also proud of the way that I have been able to apply many of the principles we learned in class to my participation in our Model U.N. Club. My ability to debate and to organize my thoughts in writing improved greatly throughout the year, and by second semester I found that I was participating in discussions on a daily basis, both in your class as well as others.

My hope is that you would be willing to reference the information above in your recommendation as I think it will help illustrate my growth as a student of history. I am also including a copy of my brag sheet, the list of colleges I am applying to, and my high school resume to help give you more context about me outside of class.

Again, I am so appreciative of your support. Please let me know if you have any questions or if there is anything else that I can provide.

Sincerely,

Hayley Johnson