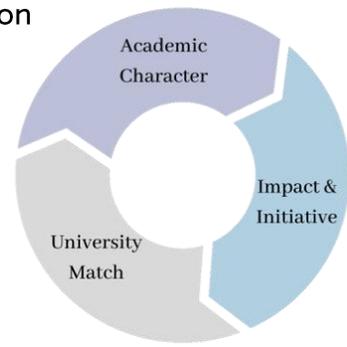


Tips and Takeaways for Writing Effective Letters of Recommendation

Philosophy of Application Review

- In reviewing applications, many admissions offices will look far beyond a student's test scores and GPA to employ a holistic, evidence based review.
- Below is a list of the primary pieces a review committee considers:
 - Application form (Common Application, Coalition for College Application, etc.)
 - Transcripts from all schools attended
 - Testing (SAT/ACT)*
 - Counselor letter and School Profile
 - Teacher letters of recommendation
 - Essays (Personal Statement, Supplemental Essay)
 - Interview/other components



**many schools are test optional for the 2021 application year*

About Letters of Recommendation

- Letters of Recommendation provide qualitative information that help to contextualize applicants beyond metrics such as GPA, test scores, and grades.
- The best letters provide concrete examples and evidence to help us understand who the applicant is as a student and community member.

Counselor Letters	Teacher Letters
Complement the school profile to show school-wide context	Describe a student's performance and academic journey in the classroom
Show how the student engages with opportunities in the larger school setting	Provide classroom-based evidence for academic character, such as work habits and how they engage with peers
Describe the student's performance and impact over totality of high school career	Show qualitative examples of student work and ability, such as topics of interest and exceptional papers or projects

Effective Counselor Letters of Recommendation should...

- Provide some context for the student within their graduating class while also highlighting major strengths and impressive or distinctive personal qualities
- Discuss the student's impact in their activities and the larger school community (i.e. more than a summary of activities, the letter should describe the impact)
- Highlight any special programs a student is involved in, either academic or extracurricular (e.g., Math and Science Academy, Leadership Institute, etc.)
- Provide context for the school and/or the student's academic opportunities that would be helpful (e.g., leave of absence, scheduling conflicts, etc.)
- Shed light upon any relevant family or personal context that admissions offices should be aware of (e.g., death or illness in the family, a long commute time, etc.)
- Speak to a student's future success using anecdotes from their high school career in order to envision that student's success moving forward
- Avoid the following: Simply listing out a student's activities and achievements; placing emphasis on quantitative data that can be found elsewhere in the application (e.g., GPA, test scores); and using ambiguous or hyperbolic language, especially across letters for different applicants from the same school

Teacher Letters of Recommendation should...

- Provide context for the student within that specific academic course
- Focus on the student and their abilities, not the teacher's background—while context is helpful, spending more than a line or two on the qualifications of the letter writer is distracting and detracts from space that could be used to describe the student
- Give insight into the student's personal qualities and their potential contributions to the college classroom—be specific!
- Expand upon current and past success and challenges
- Address distinguishing features or aspects of the student, including exceptional work
- Include a personal example regarding an actual event or experience that sticks out as memorable or notable from that student's time in the course
- Avoid common generalizations that fail to distinguish a student from their peers

Both Counselor and Teacher Letters of Recommendation should provide evidence that allows the admissions committee to see firsthand how a student engages in an academic setting, with others, or in a larger community.