

Dear Letter of Recommendation Writer,

First of all, let me offer my personal thanks for your willingness to write this letter. Writing letters can be time-consuming, but is ultimately a great service to our students in increasing their chances of getting in to law school. Whether you have written hundreds of letters or this is your first, please allow me to offer some advice based on the information our office has recently collected from law school admissions deans.

If you are unsure of what to include in your letter, consider the following things:

1. First, your audience is a group of attorneys; as such they are trained to look for evidence to support any claim. So, rather than filling a letter with statements such as, “John is great. He is very hardworking and diligent,” instead, make a statement followed by a specific example of a time when John was hardworking or diligent.
2. Second, discuss the kinds of qualities that the candidate possesses that are important in students and future attorneys (e.g. integrity, dependability, work ethic, compassion, problem-solving, people-skills, etc.).
3. Third, give your level of endorsement indicating how confident you are in the candidate’s ability to succeed both as a law student and as an attorney.

If you are going to write a negative letter or only know the student well enough to write a short, form-type letter, please inform the student of this.

One dean of admissions said, “The only thing worse than no letter at all is a bad letter.” Perhaps you do not have a high opinion of the student who has asked you for a letter of recommendation and you feel that it is your place to be honest with an admissions committee. However, it is equally important that you inform the student of the things you will write. Please inform the student that you will need to include the negative experiences you have had with them and allow them to choose whether or not to have you write the letter.

More common than the situation described above is the situation where the letter writer clearly does not know the student they are writing about such that the letter is very short and only includes information such as “John Jones took St. Dev. 198 from me in the winter of 2005. He earned an A. He is a fine student.” These letters can be as harmful to students’ applications as negative ones. If you feel unable to write a meaningful, insightful letter, please inform the student of this.

Please keep in mind the deadline the student has given you.

We strongly encourage our students to give letter writers at least 2 weeks to write letters, which should hopefully give you enough time to draft and send off the letter. If you find yourself unable to meet the deadline the student has given you, please contact the student so they can make arrangements as needed.

Thank you again for being willing to write this letter of recommendation. Please feel free to contact me directly at any time with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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