



# How to Write a Great Reference Letter

**Their Future is in Your Hands**



**by Lyle MacPherson**

*Copyright © 2008 ANB Bookstore*

A Division of ANB Inc.

**WARNING:** This Book is for your personal use only.  
You may **NOT** Give Away, Share Or Resell This  
Intellectual Property In Any Way.

All Rights Reserved

First Edition - 2009

Visit [www.anbbookstore.com](http://www.anbbookstore.com) for

Adding Value One Digital Book at a Time

## **Table of Contents**

Who Needs this Book? .....	5
About the Author.....	6
Acknowledgements .....	8
Why Do I Need a Reference Letter or Recommendation Letter? .....	9
The Confusion Around Reference Letters.....	10
Is it OK to Write My Own Reference Letter or Recommendation Letter?.....	13
Defining Recommendation Letters and Reference Letters .....	15
How Do I Ask Someone to Write a Reference Letter for Me? .....	17
What If I Have Been Asked to Write a Reference Letter? .....	20
General Layout of any Reference Letter .....	26
Tips for Writing any Reference Letter .....	29
Tips Specific to Writing a Great Recommendation Letter .....	34
Tips Specific to Writing a Great Character Reference Letter .....	36
Reference Letters in Detail.....	37
Employment Recommendation Letters.....	38
Employment Recommendation Letter FAQ .....	43
Academic Recommendation Letters .....	46
Academic Recommendation Letter FAQ.....	50
Character Reference Letters .....	53
Character Reference Letter FAQ.....	61
Thank You Letters.....	65
How to Write a Great Thank You Letter.....	67
General Layout of a Thank-You Letter.....	69

The Ultimate “Close” .....	72
APPENDIX .....	73
Sample Recommendation Letters and Reference Letters.....	73

# Who Needs this Book?

## Are You Currently in ANY of the Following Situations?

- Applying for foster care?
- Applying to adopt a child?
- Attending a parole hearing?
- Being considered for a nomination?
- Being considered for an award?
- Have you been asked to write a Reference Letter?
- Hoping to advance in your current career?
- Involved in a child custody case?
- Involved in a court hearing?
- Looking for a new job?
- Needing a General Personal Reference?
- Searching for an apartment or home?
- Seeking a membership?
- Trying to gain admission to a college or university?
- Trying to secure an appointment?

If any one of these situations currently applies to you, I promise you, **You Need This Book!**

## About the Author

My name is Lyle MacPherson. I am a Certified Management Accountant (CMA). I am presently employed as Controller and Chief Financial Officer of a group of eight companies with gross annual sales in excess of \$500 million.

My first experience with reference letters began more than 35 years ago. I was 17 years old, fresh out of high school, and looking to start a career. Two out of the first three businesses where I put in an application for employment politely requested a reference letter along with my resume.

I smiled, thanked them, and left. I had no idea what a reference letter even was. I felt completely clueless. What an embarrassing waste of time that was!

So, with no internet available back then, I went to the local library to do some research. After a ton of hours spent poring over books on the subject, I had a pretty good idea of what was required. I typed up my first two page reference letter about myself and asked two past part time employers to sign them. That was my first experience with writing a reference letter and, with it, my FIRST JOB!

Well, that first job turned into a 23-year career, 18 years of which I have worked as a supervisor and manager. Thank goodness for that GREAT first reference letter! The company employed more than 4,000 workers and the Management Team were firm believers in hiring from within whenever possible. During my time there, I was witness to hundreds of reference letters – on both sides of the fence – in an extremely competitive industry.

Like most people, before I became a hiring manager, I used reference letters to look as good as possible when I was up for a potential promotion. With more than 4,000 employees all seeking to get ahead, climbing that particular corporate ladder was very steep indeed, with dozens of employees applying for the same promotion.

Well, I ended up advancing 14 times within the ranks of that company, so I can honestly say from firsthand experience that knowing how to obtain a Great Reference Letter made a HUGE difference in my career.

On the other side of the coin, being in a position of hiring people, I have used reference letters to help me select the best applicants for every job opening. I soon learned that there was just as much value in talking to those who had written reference letters for these applicants as there was in interviewing the applicants and

perusing their resumes. It is truly amazing; people will say **WHATEVER** they **think you want to hear** in order to get what they want. I also discovered early on that the people they choose as references will most often offer the **reality** of the situation. When the two stories agree, I know I have a winner.

In fact, in my current position as Controller and Chief Financial Officer, the position I have held since May 2000, I truly place more weight on what references have to say than the applicants themselves. By the time I have finished talking to the applicants' references, I have a pretty good idea who the successful candidate will be.

In addition to the real-world experience of reading and writing recommendation letters, I also completed courses in Effective Communication and Advanced Writing, both of which contained certain aspects of “convincing” and “gently persuading” people to do what you are asking them to do.



**Here's the bottom line:** For more than 35 years, I have been using reference letters to sway others' opinions in my favor – in other words, to get what I want!

At the same time I have also written numerous reference letters to help others get what they want!

I know firsthand the value of a Great Reference Letter!

Whether you are requesting a Reference Letter or Writing a Reference Letter, this book will give you ALL the important information you need to make this very important task much easier!

# Acknowledgements

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions made by my wife Valerie. Her work history provided her with a great deal of experience in both writing and reading reference letters. Valerie's contribution to this book is greatly appreciated!

Early in her work career, she was manager of the restaurant at a busy truck stop. During her five plus years in that role she was responsible for hiring the cooks, waiters and waitresses. Like most responsible hiring managers, she insisted on reference letters and placed significant weight on their content.

When she decided to become a nurse, the career she is still advancing in to this day, she has been required to provide reference letters for each of her numerous positions.

For a period of two years she was a Nursing Instructor. During that time she was asked to write two separate reference letters for her students. With some assistance from me, she wrote glowing recommendations that resulted in her students getting started on their nursing careers.

When I embarked on the project of writing the reference letter for the couple adopting a new baby that I mentioned previously, she also spent several hours scouring the internet in search of information to assist me I writing that specific letter.

When I decided to write this book, she provided me with some of its content based on her previous experiences as well as in editing the final contents of the book.

She has been both a valuable contributor as well as a huge supporter of the effort that went in to the compilation of this book! She is my NUMBER ONE FAN!

Thank You Valerie for your support and valuable contribution!

# Why Do I Need a Reference Letter or Recommendation Letter?

The answer to this question is quite simple: A Great reference letter can mean the difference between you being **accepted** or **rejected**.

In all aspects of life you will be really “in the business” of soft-selling. No matter what career, college or goal you are pursuing, you will always have to sell yourself - your experiences, your intelligence, your credibility, and why you are *the* best person being considered, hands-down. You will also certainly find yourself “selling others” in the same manner – explaining, in a reference letter, why a certain individual you know merits your recommendation.

A Great reference letter can help you land that perfect job, receive that well-deserved promotion, or gain admission to your Dream College or university. Or perhaps you need a place to stay, like that great apartment just a few blocks away from your workplace.

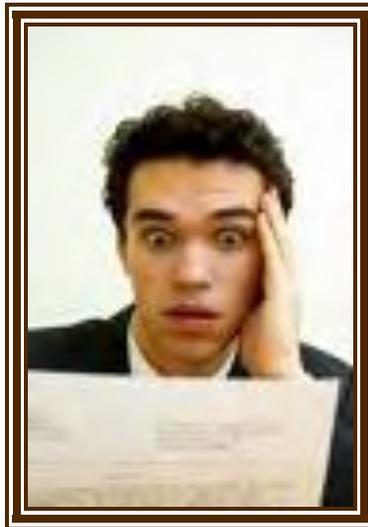
Regardless of your pursuit, you need to understand that certainly what **you** say about yourself is important...but, what **someone else** says about you is even **more** important.

When you can offer third-party proof that you are who you say you are, the person making the decision regarding your future will deem you highly worthy of consideration and **you gaining acceptance**.



# The Confusion Around Reference Letters

Due to the lack of information available regarding this subject, there is a great deal of confusion about the many different **types** of reference letters.



Reference letters are often referred to in many different ways, including the following:

- Recommendation Letters
- Letters of Recommendation
- Reference Letters
- Letters of Reference
- Commendation Letters
- Performance Evaluation Letters

## So what's the Problem?

The biggest problem here, obviously, is that these terms are often used interchangeably. For example, people often throw around the term "Recommendation Letter" when what they really need is a "Character Reference Letter" – without really understanding that there is a **HUGE** difference between the two.

If someone asks for a recommendation letter, and the person being asked has a totally different concept of what is being requested you've got a big problem! The contents of a reference letter for someone seeking employment will be much different than a reference letter for someone seeking college admission. Both of these will be much different than a general character reference letter.

Each type of reference letter has a different audience and a different purpose. It simply stands to reason that the content of the three will be much different.

It's critical for both the writer and the requester to be **VERY CLEAR** about what type of reference letter is required so that the result is what is really required.

One of the main purposes of this book is to clear up some of the confusion surrounding these important issues.

The truth of the matter is that there are only **three main types** of reference letters:

### 1. Employment Recommendation Letters

### 2. Academic Recommendation Letters

### 3. Character Reference Letters

Throughout this book, I will use the term "**Reference Letter**" when discussing this subject in "**general**" terms. Just please understand that there are very distinct differences between the three as you will soon learn.

## **Employment Recommendation Letters**

An **Employment Recommendation Letter** is written specifically to help someone obtain employment.

## **Academic Recommendation Letters**

An **Academic Recommendation Letter** is written specifically for someone who is seeking entry into undergraduate and/or graduate programs at a college or university, or for someone about to receive a scholarship or fellowship.

## **Character Reference Letters**

Also referred to as a “Personal Reference Letters” or “Personal Recommendation Letters,” a **Character Reference Letter** should illustrate an individual’s most positive personal attributes. This type of reference letter is most often used for important, non-employment and non-academic related pursuits.

# Is it OK to Write My Own Reference Letter or Recommendation Letter?

The person determining whether you are worthy of your desired goal will get information from you by some kind of interview with you. But, as is often the case, we can't take everyone at face value – and this is where your need for a reference from a third party comes in.

A great reference letter or recommendation letter supplies third-party proof that you are who you say that you are and that you are therefore worthy of serious consideration. You need someone else to back up your story! What you REALLY need is someone else's signature on the letter other than your own.

You **may**, however, be asked to provide some, or even all of the “**content**” of the letter yourself. In this situation, you will be the one putting the words on the page for someone else's signature. This is often the case when the person asked to provide a reference letter for you is not good with words, not good at writing a professional letter or simply doesn't have the time to sit down and think of the many glowing things to say about you! This person, however, has agreed to vouch for what you say by putting their name and signature at the bottom of the letter.

Writing a Great Reference Letter can easily take several hours. For this reason, it not unusual for a Manager or Professor to ask you to write a good portion of the letter that they will later be happy to review, edit and sign for you.

**If you must** write your own reference letter due to the circumstances I just mentioned, keep the following important points in mind during the writing process:

- Remember that you have two **different audiences**: the one you have asked to sign the letter, and the recipient of your reference letter. While you must satisfy both, the one signing the letter is the more important one, so try to write as much as possible from their perspective.
- Follow the **specific formats** for each type of reference letter as outlined below.
- Always address numerous **positive aspects** of yourself and your character. You will want to discuss your strengths, your skills, your abilities, your personality, your aptitude, your community involvement, your hobbies, etc. You obviously want to emphasize your strongest points; however, keep in

mind that emphasizing **too much attention in one area** will create the impression that you are not well-rounded. You want to demonstrate that you are GREAT at many things, not just one or two things.

- Always be **honest** with yourself when writing your letter. You should certainly focus mostly on your strengths. However, the readers of your letter know that you are human, and as such, know that you are not perfect. If there are things that you are not particularly good at, point them out. This will make you appear both “human” and honest. You want the reader of your letter to realize that you are very competent while at the same time, you have weaknesses just like everyone else, so express these by being open and honest.
- **Never, ever brag!** Your credibility and your character are your most important assets, and they will remain so throughout your entire life. If you are perceived as a braggart, flinging a big ego around, you’re sunk. You truly cannot risk losing your good reputation by bragging, exaggerating, lying, or assigning more self-importance to yourself than is necessary. People can and will see right through this, and it will only backfire on you. Always be honest, and even if you don’t get everything you ask for, you’ll know you did your best and were truthful about it.
- Unless otherwise indicated, provide a letter that is **virtually complete**, polished and basically ready to sign. Remember, these people, your references, are doing you a favor, and you don’t want to use up any more of their time than necessary. If you are both completely on the “same wavelength,” they may simply agree to sign your letter as you have written it and hand it right back to you. In my experience, however, this is not usually the case. More often than not, the individual signing the letter will add, delete or re-word a few things congruent to their beliefs in you. Because they are putting their name on your letter, this is absolutely the right thing for them to do, so always accept their changes gracefully and with appreciation.

# Defining Recommendation Letters and Reference Letters

As I've previously discussed, the term "**Recommendation** Letter" is often used interchangeably with the term "**Reference** Letter"; however, there is a distinct difference between the two types of letters.

Although both types of letters are primarily used to introduce a person and vouch for his or her skills, abilities, integrity, character, and interests, the difference between the two is significant.

A **recommendation** letter usually contains information specific to the person applying for a **job** or for entrance into **college** or university. The information is more specifically related to skills, and qualifications.

A **recommendation** letter is more specific and usually for the purpose of obtaining employment or admission to advanced education. The information is more related to skills and abilities than it is to personal characteristics.

A **reference** letter is usually more general in nature and refers more to the **overall character** of a person. The information is more related to an individual's personality and character than it is to their skills and abilities.

## Definition of a Recommendation Letter

A "**Recommendation Letter**" or "Letter of Recommendation" is a letter in which the writer assesses the qualifications, skills, abilities, interests, and capabilities of the person being recommended in terms of that individual's ability to perform a particular task or function.

"Recommendation Letters" are almost always requested by someone, and are therefore normally specifically addressed to that particular requestor. Recommendation letters are typically related to employment, college admissions, or scholarship eligibility.

## Definition of a Reference Letter

A "**Reference Letter**" or "Letter of Reference" is a letter in which the writer makes a general assessment of the qualities, interests, attitude, integrity, community involvement, and personal characteristics of a person.

Reference letters are typically used in situations where an individual's character is being assessed. A reference letter also confirms details about an individual's situation or circumstances.

Reference letters are general in nature and usually addressed to "Whom It May Concern". If the name of the recipient is known, you should address the letter to that person specifically.



# How Do I Ask Someone to Write a Reference Letter for Me?

When considering asking someone to write a reference letter for you, take some time to think carefully about both the **reader** of the letter and your relationship with the **writer** of the letter.

Who you will ask will depend on the **type** of letter you require, which I will cover in more detail later in this book, but in general, you need to consider these basic guidelines.

## Who Should I Ask to Write the Letter for Me?

You should ask someone who:

- ✓ Would be **comfortable** writing a letter for you.
- ✓ **Writes well** and easily.
- ✓ Has **experience** writing reference letters.
- ✓ Is **familiar** with you, your work, abilities, qualifications, interests, skills, hobbies, etc.
- ✓ **Knows** you well enough to be able to include personal stories about you in the letter.
- ✓ **Ideally** choose someone who has extensive, professional or business experience.

## How Should I Ask Them?

You should follow these basic guidelines when considering how to ask for a reference letter:

- ✓ Be **straightforward** when requesting any reference letter;
- ✓ Explain the **importance** of the letter and exactly why (and when) the letter is required.

- ✓ Whenever possible, try to get a sense of the writer's comfort level before actually making your request.
- ✓ Never put your writer on the spot.
- ✓ Always offer to provide them with information that will make writing your letter as easy as possible. You may even want to offer to compose the letter yourself for the writer to simply sign.
- ✓ If they will be writing the letter entirely themselves, offer them a copy of this book to be used as their guideline. Refer them to the specific sections of the book that are relevant to the type of letter they will be writing.

## **When Should I Ask Them?**

Every situation is different, of course, but in general, the more time you allow the writer to complete the letter, the better. As a general rule of thumb, you should request your letter at least a month in advance – two if possible. Remember, this person is doing you a favor, and if at all possible, time should be on **their** side. Asking someone to “hurry” when writing your reference letter is a good way to write yourself **out** of a good recommendation!

## **Other Important Points to Consider when Asking Someone to Write a Reference Letter for You**

- You should carefully **communicate** with the people who agree to write your letters. Tell them about your goals and what they might write that would help you to achieve those goals. Now is not the time to be shy! As I pointed out earlier, a reference letter is simply a sales letter that is intended to “sell you” as a person. Now is the time to step up to the plate and point out all of your accomplishments! You can be shy another time!

***“Sell yourself, but don’t ever show a hint of arrogance.”***

- You should **follow up** your request for a reference letter (in writing) with a review of your conversation. Include specific phrases or sentences that the writer could use in your reference letter. Be sure to also include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your writer’s convenience.

- If you don't receive your reference letters within 10 days of your conversations with your prospective writers, contact them by telephone or in person to **confirm** that they are aware of your deadlines.
- **Follow up** with each writer to let them know about your results and how much their reference letters helped you attain your goal(s).
- Always **thank** the writer(s) of your references letters for investing their time on your behalf, in pursuit of your desired future. The last section of this book deals specifically with [How to Write a Great Thank You Letter](#).



# What If I Have Been Asked to Write a Reference Letter?

So, what do you do if the tables are suddenly turned? Someday, or maybe already, someone may ask **you** to write a reference letter on their behalf.

There are **five** basic questions that you need to ask yourself before you agree to perform this important task:

1. Do I have the **time** to write a great reference letter?
2. Do I honestly feel **comfortable** writing a reference letter for this person?
3. Am I truly the **right person** to compose a reference letter for this person?
4. Do I **know** the person well enough to discuss his or her strengths and accomplishments?
5. Can I **honestly** write **positive** things about the person who has requested the reference letter?

If you cannot answer “yes” to most or all of these questions, you should bow out gracefully right from the beginning. A reference letter is designed to make someone look good to another person who is in a position of influence. If you feel that you cannot honestly paint a good picture of the person, you will be doing them a disservice by agreeing to write the letter.

It is far better to politely decline right at the outset than to waste your valuable time trying to do something that you know in your heart will not have the result that your requester desires. Also, the person asking for the reference letter will be much better off and be able to quickly move on to someone who can write a glowing recommendation for them.

That is not to say that the person who asked you is not worthy of a Great Recommendation. We all see each other in a different light based on our experiences with each other and how we perceive those experiences. While one person’s experiences with the letter requester may be mostly positive ones, you, on the other hand, may have had a totally different set of experiences or you may see things from a different perspective.

Remember, a reference letter is meant to be an honest summary of your thoughts about a particular individual. Also, keep in mind that this individual needs

to look their very best to their potential readers. You should not waste your time or keep your requester hanging on a limb if you believe that you are not the best person to write a glowing recommendation for them. Again, you'll both be better off by simply politely, but firmly, declining right from the beginning.

The bottom line is simply this: If you cannot give a strong positive recommendation, express your regret and suggest that someone else would be in a better position to write their letter.

***“Never, EVER write something about someone that you do not believe in 100%.....NO MATTER WHAT!!”***

Now, let's assume that you have answered “yes” to most or all of these questions. You believe that you are qualified to make a reasonable, positive assessment of the person who has asked you to write the reference letter, and you also believe you have the ability to compose a very well-written, expressive reference letter on their behalf.

### **What steps can I take to ensure that you will write the best reference letter that I possibly can?**

The first thing you should do is meet with the individual and have a brainstorming session. Get a good idea of the exact purpose of the letter and who the recipients and ultimate decision makers will be. This will help you understand the tone and style you need to employ when writing the reference letter and it will also allow you to know the pertinent information required to be included in the specific situation, as well as “what to leave out.”

Your brainstorming session should be quite extensive. You and the person you are writing the reference letter for cannot afford to make a mistake or say the wrong or inappropriate thing. Ask questions about their goals and aspirations. You need to know what they are specifically trying to accomplish so that you can then direct your comments specifically to those goals.

Ask the person provide you with a list of their major accomplishments, the organizations they belong to, and any other relevant information. It may surprise you to see how much that person has done outside of your personal contact with them. This will also help you get a more accurate picture of the individual so that you can truly write the best reference letter on their behalf.

Obtain a copy of their resume and keep this information nearby while writing your reference letter for them. Remember, however, that you should only vouch for what you know from your **own personal experience** with the individual.

Ask whether there are specific skills, topics, accomplishments, issues, etc., that he or she wishes to be said or included in the letter, and, likewise, whether there are any specific things that should be left entirely out of the letter!

Ask them **exactly** when the reference letter is due, and make sure that you have adequate time to write the letter in order to have it completed by the agreed-upon deadline. Make every effort to honor the deadline.

## **Put Yourself in the Reader's Shoes**

The first thing to remember is that the reader of your letter will likely have numerous reference letters to review other than the one you are writing. They are usually very busy individuals who have a limited amount of time to devote to each letter they receive. It is important that your letter **really stand out** in order to grab their attention.

In addition to the reference letter, a hiring manager will also have the job applicant's resume, and the faculty or admissions reader will have the college applicant's transcripts and test scores. All of the readers will also have the opportunity to interview the applicants in person.

With all this information already in the reader's possession, what could a reference letter possibly provide them with that they do not already have? Remember that one of the main purposes of a reference letter is to provide third party verification that what the applicant has indicated in the other pieces of information can be verified by someone. Simply put, a well written reference letter will add a great deal of credibility to what the applicant has already indicated.

What the readers are looking for in the reference letter are **four additional dynamics** that only a reference letter can provide. The reader is specifically looking for:

1. A sense that you know the applicant well enough to be able to make **sound judgments** about them. As the reader is reviewing your letter, they will be asking themselves these questions about you the writer:
  - What is your **expertise**?
  - How **important** are you?

- How relevant is your **background** to the recommendation you are making?
2. The sense that **your credentials** are worthy of consideration given the context for which the applicant is applying. The reader needs to feel that what you say in your letter is believable and worth listening to. The reader needs to know these things:
    - Are you the applicant's supervisor, professor, co-worker?
    - How long have you been in a position to be able to judge the applicant's talents, skills, abilities, attributes, and performance?
  3. A sense of your **overall opinion** of the applicant. Is your letter positive, negative, lukewarm, or something in between? If you feel anything less than positive, it will come through loud and clear when you write your letter. Words have a way of conveying feelings, so be certain you can vouch for the applicant in a positive manner.
  4. Insight into the applicant's **personal attributes**. These personal insights are intangibles in that they usually cannot be obtained from a resume or transcript and sometimes not even from a personal interview with the applicant.

In an **Employment** Recommendation Letter, examples of personal attributes to include are:

- Are they responsible?
- Are they hard working and dedicated?
- Do they have leadership potential?
- Are they punctual and reliable?
- Do they communicate well?
- Are they a team player?
- Are they good at solving problems?
- Do they possess honesty and integrity?
- Are they flexible and adaptable?
- How well do they handle pressure?

In an **Academic** Recommendation Letter, examples of personal attributes to include are:

- Are they committed to the field they are considering?
- Are they serious about their studies?
- Do they have the potential to complete courses in higher education?
- Are they well rounded?
- Are they confident about succeeding?
- Do they value higher education?
- How do they interact with their peers and educators?

In a **Character** Reference Letter, examples of personal attributes to include are:

- Are they responsible?
- Do they demonstrate self control?
- Are they honest?
- Are they caring and kind to others?
- Do they have good social skills?
- Are they dependable?
- Are they reliable?
- Are they self reliant?
- Are they mature?
- Do they exhibit sound judgment?

If you **include all four** of these underlying dynamics when writing your recommendation letters and make them distinctly recognizable, you will have accomplished a great deal!



You will be providing the reader with a complete, distinct “picture” of the applicant and why they should be seriously considered!

*“Writing a Great reference letter can be a lot of work but it is also very rewarding to know that you have helped someone you know and care about to achieve their goals.”*

# General Layout of any Reference Letter

Regardless of the type of reference letter you're seeking or writing, as a rule, reference letters, have **three** main sections:

## Opening

The opening should consist of **two** brief paragraphs. The purpose of the opening is to indicate your initial recommendation about the applicant and to explain who you are and how you know the person for who you're writing the reference letter.

The **first paragraph** (usually consisting of a single sentence) should state the purpose of the letter. Referred to as the "opening line", you would simply state that you are providing a recommendation for the applicant.

Choose your words carefully, particularly at the beginning of the letter. The all important first sentence will set the tone for the remainder of the letter.

Here are a few examples of **opening lines** and how they are most often **interpreted** by the reader:

Opening Lines	Reader's First Impression
This letter is in reference to....	Very low
This serves as a letter of reference for....	Fairly low
I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation for....	Average
I am pleased to recommend....	Fairly high
It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend....	Very high

The opening is often the most important part of the entire letter. When you consider that the reader is a busy individual with many different letters, resumes, and transcripts to review, it is safe to assume that they will not devote much time to

reading each and every reference letter from beginning to end. As such, then, the very **first impression** they get is **critical** and often **lasting**. Given this, it becomes quite clear that your overall opinion of the applicant must be made very early in the letter. A great reference letter should always communicate most, if not all, of your honest, overall opinions in the first sentences or two.

It is very important to understand that the message contained in the opening of your letter must match the tone of the rest of your letter, as this is where many readers will form their first and often lasting impression of the applicant.

The **second paragraph** should explain how you know the individual. Indicate the context of your relationship and how long you have known them. Be very clear about what your relationship is to the applicant. In other words, are they your subordinate, a co-worker, a student, a peer, a family member, a close friend, etc.

## **Body**

The body of the letter should comprise the majority of the text. This is the section where you should “**sell**” all of the great qualities of the person. You should also describe your past experiences with the applicant and provide specific details and examples of their good qualities. These qualities should of course be applicable to the situation to which you are making the recommendation. If the reference letter is intended for someone seeking employment as an accountant, the details and examples you provide should reflect that person’s skills as they relate to accounting, even if they have excellent knowledge in other, unrelated areas. For example, maybe the person is a wonderful artist or has a nursing degree. Although these are wonderful talents and skills, this information would not be useful to the person seeking to hire a good accountant. In other words, **stay on topic**.

The body of the letter is usually several paragraphs in length (two to six), with each paragraph normally consisting of two to four sentences.

The first paragraph should summarize the applicant’s specific favorable attributes. Use this paragraph to characterize the individual in “general” terms; it should serve as an “introduction” of sorts.

The next several paragraphs should address in detail each of the specific attributes that you summarized in the first paragraph. Include personal stories whenever possible to back up your assessments. Use specific examples to characterize each attribute. Each specific attribute should be dealt with in a separate

paragraph. Address each of the attributes or qualities in their order of importance as it relates to the situation.

The final paragraph of the body should include reasons why the individual is seeking a new assignment (if relevant). For example, if they were laid off, you would want to mention the reason the individual was laid off (i.e. company downsizing, plant closure, poor economy, etc.)

## **Close**

The close of the reference letter should be one or two paragraphs of a couple of sentences each.

The close is designed to **reinforce** your belief in the applicant. This is where you should reiterate and express your level of confidence in the individual.

The close should also contain your **personal recommendation** regarding the situation for which the letter is being used. You should explain the degree to which you believe the individual is suited to the job, position, or program being sought.

At this point, you should also encourage the reader to contact you for additional information or with any questions they may have. Include the best method for them to contact you. This would usually be your phone number or email address.

Always end the close by personally signing the letter in your own hand. Do not have your assistant sign the letter, and **never** “rubber stamp” it. The reader should feel that you at least think enough of the applicant to take the time to personally sign the letter. This is particularly important if the letter was prepared by the applicant themselves.

# Tips for Writing any Reference Letter

## Appearance

Always, always **type your reference letter**. Even if your handwriting is as elegant as a calligrapher's, never submit a hand-written reference letter. A reference letter casts a reflection on both the writer and the applicant. A typed document always expresses a more professional look and feel, and will be taken much more seriously by the reader or decision maker.

***“First impressions are important! Get off to a Great start by submitting a professional looking reference letter. It will make a difference!”***

The physical appearance of your letter is so important that it may determine whether your letter even gets read by the recipient.

Always print the letter on good-quality, white paper and on a laser printer if at all possible. Make it crisp, clean, and professional. You may have spent hours filling the letter with excellent content, but if the letter does not have a professional look, it may just end up in the garbage can.

As a Type 'A' Professional Accountant, I appreciate my paperwork “just right”. I personally like to receive an applicant's reference letter in a 9” x 12” envelope rather than folded and mailed in a standard size envelope. I don't like having to unfold the letter and there is always a crease through some line of type making it more difficult to read. Go the extra mile and mail or deliver your reference letter in large envelope.

***“All of these little things will add up in the readers mind.”***

## Content

Before composing your reference letter, focus on several different aspects of the person you are writing about.

Be as specific as possible when you're referring to their skills, performance, attitude, personal attributes, hobbies, contributions, growth, etc. Your comments

should focus **only** on the time period that you have known the individual. Go only with what you know personally, and not what you've heard about the individual.

Be honest with your comments. **Never** attempt to say things that you are not 100% sure are accurate or that you do not firmly believe about the individual.

## Length

Reference letters usually contain between five and ten paragraphs with a total word count ranging between 200 and 600 words. Using this format, your letter should be one to two typed pages.

Longer does **not** necessarily mean better. Remember, the reader is most often too busy to hang on to every word. They are more likely to do a quick review in search of the [four dynamics discussed previously](#).

The more significant the writer's credentials, the less time they will have to devote to writing a reference letter. In other words, a College Professor would be able to write a shorter letter than, say, a fellow student because the reader will place more **value** on what the Professor has to say over a fellow student.

If the writer is more personally attached to the applicant, it is safe to assume that they will include personal stories or anecdotes. It normally takes more time to tell a story than mention a simple attribute, so these types of letters will be longer in length than those that do not contain personal stories about the applicant.

## Word Usage

***“Choose your words carefully! Certain words that seem harmless in everyday conversation can carry both positive and negative connotations in written form.”***

**Do Use** positive words and phrases, such as these:

- ✓ Admirable
- ✓ Articulate
- ✓ Cooperative
- ✓ Creative

- ✓ Dependable
- ✓ Effective
- ✓ Efficient
- ✓ Excellent
- ✓ Expressive
- ✓ Great
- ✓ Honest
- ✓ Imaginative
- ✓ Innovative
- ✓ Intelligent
- ✓ Mature
- ✓ Observant
- ✓ Reliable
- ✓ Significant
- ✓ Sophisticated
- ✓ Sound Judgment
- ✓ Superb
- ✓ Terrific

**Do Not Use** words that carry a half-baked, ambivalent, unclear message, such as these:

- × Adequate
- × Decent
- × Fair
- × Fairly
- × Good

- × Nice
- × OK
- × Reasonable
- × Satisfactory

## **Positive Attributes**

Positive attributes are a critical part of any reference letter. They let the reader know, by way of third party verification, that the person they are considering has a specific set of positive qualities. What the reader is looking to see in the reference letter are some of the same positive qualities that the applicant mentioned during the interview.

The following is a partial list of positive attributes that are often used when describing an individual. This is merely a sample of favorable phrases that can be used while writing a reference letter and is meant to stimulate thinking while preparing the letter. The letter would include as many of these types of phrases as it takes to best describe the individual's skills, talents, abilities, beliefs, and ethics in a descriptive and positive manner:

- Action orientated
- Active imagination
- Appropriate vocational skills
- Communicates effectively
- Consistently demonstrates high level of commitment
- Demonstrates competitiveness
- Displays a high level of intelligence
- Displays sincerity and empathy
- Exceptional leadership ability
- Flexible
- Focused on achieving goals
- Follows direction

- Handles conflict well
- High-energy level
- High level of self-knowledge
- Mover / shaker
- Possesses a divergent, abstract thinking style
- Possesses excellent interpersonal skills
- Self confident
- Self motivated
- Takes initiative
- Willing to accept responsibility

Positive attributes are simply good things that can be **honestly** said about a person. Take a long look through your history with this person and then ask yourself, “What do you seen in them?”



# Tips Specific to Writing a Great Recommendation Letter

- Start by indicating how you know the applicant. State the exact nature of your relationship with them.
- Immediately “disqualify yourself” if you are a **relative**.
- Indicate why you are qualified to write the recommendation letter. The reader needs to understand the ways in which you’re fully capable to offer a recommendation for this person.
- Mention other people you have known that are of the applicant's caliber, and how this makes the applicant stand out among one of the best people you know.
- **List** the applicant's exceptional skills, abilities and qualifications. This should always be done with the applicant's educational field of interest or job requirements in mind. In other words, the skills and qualifications you include must be relevant to the situation.
- Unless it is absolutely relevant or requested, **never** state the applicant's race, religion, national origin, age, whether they are disabled, or their gender or marital status.
- **Emphasize** all the key points of which you want the reader to be aware.
- Firmly state why you believe the applicant should be considered over others.
- If applicable, make general, “story-telling” kinds of comparisons between the applicant and other people you have known in order to raise the level of the applicant’s qualifications.
- **Never generalize**. Provide specific examples to back up what you write about the person's qualifications, skills, and character.
- Offer your personal judgment of the applicant, including their qualifications and potential. Would **you** hire them? Would **you** want them in your class?

- **Don't be too lengthy, but don't be too brief.** Be specific and concise. Make every word count.
- Make your closing statement strong without overdoing it. Excessive praise can be viewed as biased or insincere.
- Provide your contact information (email, telephone, fax) if you are willing to provide more information, if necessary.
- Proofread your letter carefully. Your reference letter is a reflection on both you and the applicant.
- The best way to determine how your letter will sound when it is being read is to **read it out loud** to yourself. This will quickly identify poor grammar, unclear comments and sentences that just do not flow properly.

# Tips Specific to Writing a Great Character Reference Letter

- Start by indicating how you know the applicant. State the exact nature of your **relationship** with them.
- Indicate why you are qualified to write the recommendation letter. The reader needs to understand the ways in which you are fully capable to offer a recommendation for this person.
- **List** the applicant's positive personal qualities, attributes and characteristics.
- Write only complimentary, factual observations.
- **Emphasize** all the key points of which you want the reader to be aware.
- **Be specific!** General praise is a waste of time and effort.
- **Never** state weaknesses. If you can't write a positive reference letter, you should respectfully decline.
- A reference letter is essentially a sales letter; your purpose is to “sell” a person. We do this every day without even realizing it, so don't be shy. Now is the time to brag! Just remember to be truthful, specific and genuine with your praise.
- **Don't be too lengthy, but don't be too brief.** Be specific and concise. Make every word count.
- Make your closing statement strong without overdoing it. Excessive praise can be viewed as biased or insincere.
- Provide your contact information (email, telephone, fax) if you are willing to provide more information, if necessary.
- Proofread your letter carefully. Your reference letter is a reflection on both you and the applicant.
- The best way to determine how your letter will sound when it is being read is to **read it out loud** to yourself. This will quickly identify poor grammar, unclear comments and sentences that just do not flow properly.

# Reference Letters in Detail

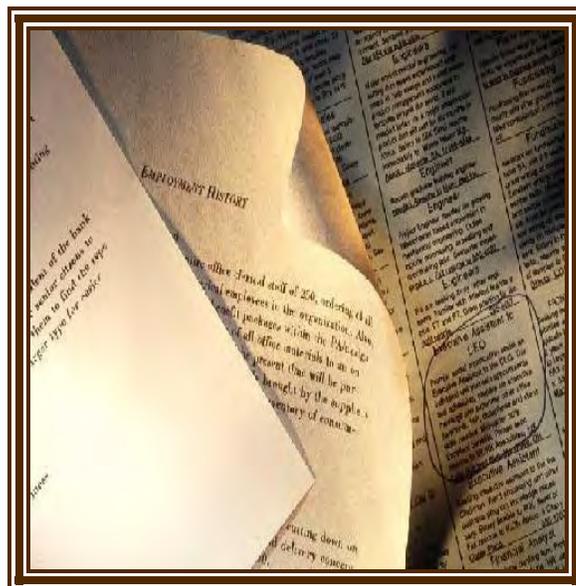
As we have established, there are basically three distinct types of reference letters:

1. Employment Recommendation Letters
2. Academic Recommendation Letters
3. Character Reference Letters

Each of these three types of reference letters has unique and distinct purposes. They will be used by different individuals for different reasons.

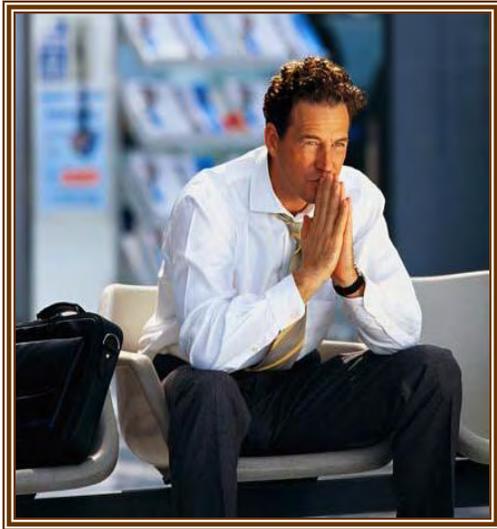
*“In any reference letter, the ultimate goal is to effectively communicate in writing that a certain individual is worthy of consideration.”*

Up to this point I have talked about the who, what, where, when, and why of writing a reference letter in **general** terms. In the remaining sections of this book, I will discuss each type of reference letter separately and in greater detail!



# Employment Recommendation Letters

## What is an Employment Recommendation Letter?



Employment recommendation letters are meant specifically to help someone obtain employment.

This type of letter is usually an official document prepared on company letterhead. It is written in a formal fashion and usually follows a standard, impersonal format.

These letters are always addressed to a specific person and are normally provided only at the request of the hiring manager.

Employment recommendation letters are courtesies extended in the business community. They are "report cards" written by employers or co-workers in your past to potential employers in your future.

To be valuable, these letters must objectively rate an individual's overall job performance. This means they will cover all relevant aspects of the applicant's work – both positive and negative. Although they should primarily address strengths, they may also contain weaknesses or certain challenges some of us must deal with. Let's face it, we are all human. None of us are perfect. Hiring managers find credibility in a reference letter that reports minor weaknesses the applicant may have.

If the letter is nothing but glowing from start to finish, it may appear to be contrived or made up and will not present an accurate reflection of the individual. While it is important to mention certain weaknesses, do keep in mind that the letter **must** demonstrate that the individual's strengths outweigh their weaknesses.

Employment recommendation letters are used by employers who want to know if their applicant is, among other things, honest, reliable, a hard worker, a good time manager, and pleasant to work with. In other words, the purpose of an employment recommendation letter is to help the employer hire the most trusted and valuable applicant they possibly can.

Employers also use this letter to help judge a person's character in addition to their job skills and qualifications. As such, the employment reference letter has considerable value to both the job seeker and potential employers.

An employment recommendation letter can dramatically impact one's chances of securing the job they desire; this is why it is so important to have access to at least three to five great recommendation letters. This is especially important when there are several employers requesting this type of letter.

## **Who Should Write an Employment Recommendation Letter?**

Ideally, an employment recommendation letter should be written by someone who has known the job applicant very well for **at least** one year (preferably longer).

They should be people who have a detailed knowledge of the job applicant's major skills, strengths and abilities.

Most references should come from previous supervisors and co-workers with whom the job applicant has worked closely with in the past. Former coaches, vendors, customers, and business acquaintances are also acceptable.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that they can only ask people who were senior to them, such as previous managers or supervisors, to write their reference letters. The key is that the writer must be someone who can "honestly" speak highly of the job applicant's accomplishments, work ethic, skills, education, performance, etc.

***“A family member should never be the one to write any kind of Employment Recommendation Letter. Not only is this unprofessional, but these letters will be considered too impartial in the eyes of the prospective employer.”***

## **Contents of an Employment Recommendation Letter**

An employment recommendation letter is a major component in any successful job search. Every job seeker knows that in addition to their own ability to sell their job skills and qualifications, they also will need support from qualified people who are willing to support their candidacy. Having a third party confirm

your skills and qualifications is critical to your success in attaining the job you desire.

Prior to writing a reference letter, it's important to understand what the reader of the letter wants to get out of the letter. Refer to the section where we talk about the [four additional dynamics](#) that a great reference letter provides the reader.

With the following tips in mind, you will be able to create a meaningful employment recommendation letter or advise someone on how to write one on your behalf:

- Employment recommendation letters are always addressed to a specific person.
- An employment recommendation letter is simply a reflection of a person's skills, abilities, and other work related attributes and characteristics.
- The attributes discussed in these letters should be objectively stated, but subjectively chosen. In other words, the good things should be included in the letter and the not-so-good things should be left out.
- An employment recommendation letter should provide **evidence** that the writer's high opinion of the individual is valid. This is best accomplished by recounting specific events concerning the person being referred to in the letter. In essence, the employment recommendation letter should include one or more short, believable stories that the writer knows personally about the individual.
- The body of the letter should be a narrative that recounts one to three specific incidents regarding the individual. Again, these incidents should demonstrate his or her positive attributes. They should be examples of how he or she behaves in everyday life.

With the reader in mind, these **five** important points should be considered when writing an employment recommendation letter:

1. **Avoid** negative, unflattering, ambiguous, or derogatory remarks. If you cannot do this, then do not write the letter.
2. **Include** factual, verifiable observations that have been documented or can be substantiated.
3. **Avoid** comments about handicapped status, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or marital or parental status. In other words, do not include

comments that could be interpreted as biased or that could **provoke** bias in any way.

4. An effective employment reference letter is meant to:
  - ✓ Verify experience
  - ✓ Confirm competence
  - ✓ Build credibility
  - ✓ Bolster confidence
5. Before writing an employment reference letter on someone's behalf, it is always a good idea to determine whether your company has a set of policies that have been established to protect the company and its employees against potential lawsuits.

More **specifically**, you should carefully consider all of the following points in order to write the most effective employment recommendation letter possible:

- ✓ Begin the letter by explaining how you know the job applicant. State the nature of your relationship. Are they your neighbor? A co-worker or a business acquaintance? Your student? Were you a boss, a mentor, a colleague, or a peer? What was the chain of command? Did you report to them? Did they report to you? Were you on a project team together?
- ✓ Indicate how long you have known the applicant. This helps the reader assess how well you know the person.
- ✓ State the applicant's current title and position, including the position's primary responsibilities, along with any professional associations to which they may belong.
- ✓ Write the letter as though you were the one reading the letter. What would **you** like to know as the hiring manager?
- ✓ Adequately address three main traits of the person requesting the letter. Is the person honest? Are they reliable and dependable? Are they the kind of person you would want to have on **your** team?
- ✓ Using the subject's resume, focus on the achievements, qualities, and skills that are most likely to interest the reader or that most impressed you. Just remember that you **must** always be able to honestly vouch for what you write!

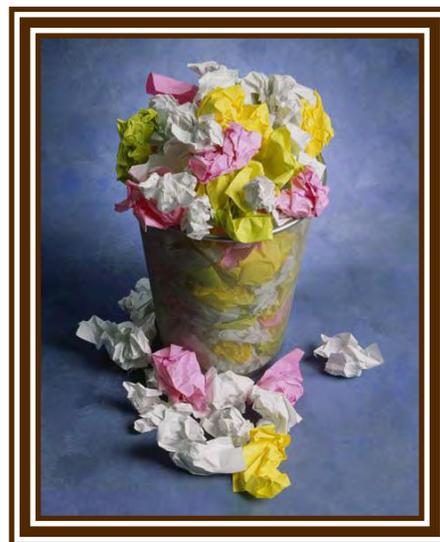
- ✓ Use personal stories or observations about your work experiences with the job applicant when appropriate. Objective facts are certainly important, but they should be balanced with personal reflections about the applicant.
- ✓ Include your level of willingness to work with the job seeker again.
- ✓ Include at least one positive, specific example of an experience with the applicant that sticks out in your mind.
- ✓ Be specific and personal. Use the person's first name in the letter. Take the time to avoid sounding too generic, as though you are talking about just anyone.
- ✓ If you still feel **obligated** to reference negative things about the individual, try to be as positive as you can as a whole. If this is impossible for you, you should politely refuse to write the letter.

Always keep in mind the position the applicant is applying for when listing important attributes. For example, suppose the person you're writing about is applying to be a security guard. You would obviously want to include character traits like “reliable, honest, trustworthy,” etc.

Likewise, if you are writing for a person seeking a position as a receptionist, you would include other qualities, like “friendly, witty, and conversational.” While being “friendly and witty” might be very important to someone hiring a receptionist, these attributes are much less important to someone hiring a security guard.

Are you having trouble getting started or struggling with what to say in your recommendation letter?

Refer to the Sample [Employment Recommendation Letter](#) in the Appendix at the end of this book.



# Employment Recommendation Letter



## *Question #1*

If I request an employment recommendation letter from my Human Resources Department, what kind of information would be included?

## *Answer #1*

The employment recommendation letter can take one of many different styles, but should always include some basic information about your employment. It would include the dates of your employment, your job title and a brief description of your responsibilities. It would include your current level of abilities and skills, plus any special commendations for your performance. If you have any say in the matter, you should also ask the Human Resources Department to include the fact that you are leaving the company in good standing.

## *Question #2*

How would I write an employment recommendation letter for my friend, who is applying for a job as a Nanny?

## *Answer #2*

It doesn't matter whether the job is that of a Nanny or a Vice President of Marketing – the employment recommendation letter should essentially say the same things. Basically, you need to mention three main traits that the person requesting the letter possesses. For example, is the person honest? Are they reliable and dependable? Are they the kind of person that you would want to have on your team?

## *Question #3*

How do I ask for an employment recommendation letter? I am getting ready to leave my current job and need a recommendation letter for my next job. What is the appropriate way to ask for a letter? I feel weird about asking for this. Do you have any suggestions?

### *Answer #3*

It's important to know that everyone, in every field of work, does this all the time. No one will be "surprised" at your request. You likely needed an employment recommendation letter to apply for the job you're now leaving, right? So have no qualms about asking for the recommendation letter. Most employers are happy to provide these letters. In fact, it is quite expected. Ask if they could have it ready by your last day. If there is a Human Resources department, your supervisor might send you there to get one.

Be aware that some corporations don't give any reference letters due to legal implications. If this is the case at your company, ask a co-worker to either write the reference letter or obtain their permission to at least use their name for a reference.

### *Question #4*

Should you include employment recommendation letters when applying **online**? I am applying for jobs online using Monster, Career Builder, Job Search, etc. What do I include in my application other than my resume? What about when I'm faxing an application or applying in person?

### *Answer #4*

There are **three** rules that apply when applying for a job regardless of whether that is on-line, via fax or in person.

**Rule number one:** Always include a cover letter. A cover letter is simply a short letter to the receiver telling them that you wish to apply for the position and what documents are also included in the package. **Rule number two:** Always tailor your resume to the job for which you are applying. Your employment history only needs to go back 10 years. **Rule number three:** In most instances you would not offer references until your potential employers ask for them. However, if the letters are from very influential people, you should submit them along with your cover letter and resume.

### *Question #5*

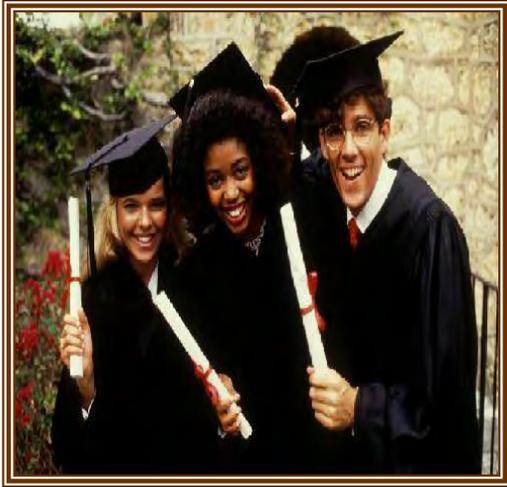
When do I submit my employment recommendation letters from previous employers when applying for a job? Do I submit them with my resume and cover letter when applying online or by fax, or do I wait until the interview to present them?

### *Answer #5*

Most employers won't even request them. It's a good rule of thumb to wait until you are asked for references and then submit them via email, fax, regular mail, or in person....all are quite acceptable.

# Academic Recommendation Letters

## What is an Academic Recommendation Letter?



Academic recommendation letters are written specifically for someone who is seeking entry into undergraduate and graduate programs at a college or university “or” for someone who is about to receive a scholarship or fellowship.

These letters are normally addressed to a specific person and should be submitted along with the admission application or as outlined in the admissions procedure.

Admission to any institute of higher learning usually requires one or more recommendation letters. Graduate programs often require the submission of two or more letters and often follow specifically outlined procedures regarding their creation and submission. If this is the case, be sure to follow those instructions carefully.

The academic recommendation letter is used to provide the admissions committee with information not found in the application. The information will confirm whether the applicant’s attributes match the school's expectations and requirements. The letter also provides an opportunity for an applicant to be seen as an individual, and should help them stand out from the other applicants.

While admission requirements differ among the various types of institutions as well as between specific programs, generally speaking, an academic recommendation letter should:

- ✓ Provide testimony regarding aptitude, curiosity and diligence.
- ✓ Demonstrate the applicant’s level of maturity and how serious they are about their purpose.
- ✓ Paint the applicant as well-rounded individual.
- ✓ Address the applicant’s good character.

- ✓ Include other pertinent information about the applicant that is relevant to their chosen vocation. This should include things that are not readily apparent from their admission test scores or transcripts.

## Who Should Write an Academic Recommendation Letter?

Academic recommendation letters for admission to post graduate studies are usually written by a past or current teacher, professor, guidance counselor, faculty member, academic advisor, or administrator.

In some cases, an employer can write the letter if academic recommendations are not available.

The person writing the recommendation must have a good understanding of the applicant's academic history, interests, goals, and direction.

***“A family member should never be the one to write any kind of Employment Recommendation Letter. Not only is this unprofessional, but these letters will be considered too impartial in the eyes of the prospective employer.”***

## Contents of an Academic Recommendation Letter

An academic recommendation letter is a major component in any successful pursuit of higher educating. It's important to understand that in addition to the applicant being able to sell their aptitude and qualifications, they also will need support from qualified people who are willing to support their candidacy. Having a third party confirm your skills and qualifications is critical to your success in attaining the job you desire.

Prior to writing a reference letter, it's important to understand what the reader of the letter wants to get out of the letter. Refer to the section where we talk about the [four additional dynamics](#) that a great reference letter provides the reader.

With the following tips in mind, you will be able to create a meaningful academic recommendation letter or advise someone on how to write one on your behalf:

- Academic recommendation letters are usually addressed to a specific person.

- An academic recommendation letter is simply a reflection of a person's current academic skills, aptitude, character and how they associate and interact with others.
- An academic recommendation letter should provide **evidence** that the writer's high opinion of the individual is valid. This is best accomplished by recounting specific events concerning the person being referred to in the letter. In essence, the academic recommendation letter should include one or more short, believable stories that the writer knows personally about the individual.
- The body of the letter should be a narrative that recounts one to three specific incidents regarding the individual. Again, these incidents should demonstrate his or her positive attributes. They should be examples of how he or she behaves in everyday life.

As a general guideline, these **four** important points should be considered when writing an academic recommendation letter.

1. **Avoid** negative, ambiguous, tentative, or unflattering remarks. If you cannot do this, then do not write the letter.
2. **Include** factual, verifiable observations about the applicant that have been documented or can be substantiated.
3. **Avoid** comments about race, color, religion, handicap, sex, national origin, marital or parental status. In other words, do not include any comments that could be interpreted as biased or that could provoke bias in any way.
4. Academic letters of recommendation should contain **evidence** of the following, if applicable:
  - Academic performance
  - Scholarships
  - Honors and awards
  - Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.
  - Willingness to follow school policy

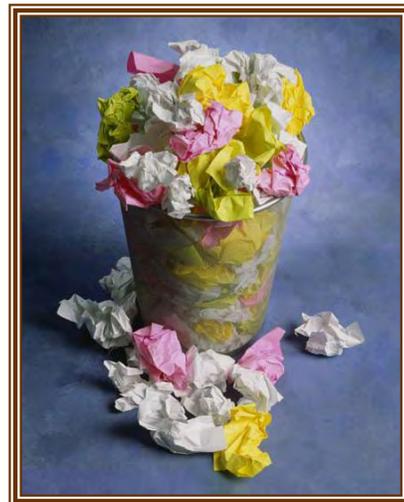
More **specifically**, you should carefully consider all of the following points in order to write the most effective academic recommendation letter possible:

- ✓ The letter should start by explaining how you know the applicant. In other words, state the nature of your **relationship** with them. Are or were they your student? Are or were they a fellow student? Are you a mentor, a colleague or a peer?
- ✓ Indicate how long you have known the individual. This helps the reader assess how well you know the person.
- ✓ Write the letter as though you were the one reading it. What would you like to know as a member of the admissions committee?
- ✓ Focus on the academic achievements, qualities, and skills that are most likely to interest the reader in addition to the ones that most impress you.
- ✓ Use personal stories or observations about your experiences with the applicant when appropriate. Objective facts are of course more important, but they must be balanced with personal reflections about the applicant.
- ✓ If you truly feel obligated to say negative things about the individual, try to be as positive as you can be overall. If you find this impossible to do, you should politely refuse to write the letter.

Are you having trouble getting started or struggling with what to say in your recommendation letter?

See Sample [Academic Recommendation Letter \(Undergraduate\)](#) in the Appendix at the end of this book.

See Sample [Academic Recommendation Letter \(Graduate\)](#) in the Appendix at the end of this book.



# Academic Recommendation Letter



## *Question #1*

Can you give me some tips on writing an academic recommendation letter for nursing school? This recommendation letter will be signed by the recreation staff at a nursing home where I am volunteering. I am applying to a nursing program, and I would like some tips!

## *Answer #1*

Your readers are mostly looking for attitude and character. I would suggest your letter include things like how you work with others, how you deal with family illnesses, difficult situations, and patients' demands. If you have experience working with the elderly and/or handicapped, you would certainly want to include that information.

Also, you could address "answers to generic questions," such as: What you enjoy most about helping people? How do you demonstrate gentleness? Why do you like to serve others? What methods do you use to soothe others' fear or pain? Do you consider yourself "tough," never quitting when things get messy or frantic? How you respond to blood, and/or other bodily fluids, emergencies, etc.

## *Question #2*

I am applying for Graduate school. In the application, they require three recommendation letters. I will be applying to at least four different schools. When asking for a recommendation letter is it ok to ask for multiple ones or should they customize each letter for each different school? How does it really work? Please Help Me!!!!

## *Answer #2*

When you are asking your references if they would be willing to write an academic recommendation letter for you, let them know that you are applying to more than one school. Provide them with a list of the schools to which you are applying. They should address each letter to the specific schools you are applying to. The content of the letters would be similar and in fact usually **identical** in content, regardless of the school, so all they really need to do is to address each letter differently.

### *Question #3*

What is the appropriate way to request an academic recommendation letter from a professor? I am applying to Graduate school, and I need three recommendation letters from my undergrad professors. Do I send them a letter with all of my personal information (i.e., GPA, organizations I belong to, etc.), or just let them write it however they choose, and request background info from me if needed?

### *Answer #3*

Whenever possible, you should make an appointment to see the respective professors in person. Tell them that you are applying to a Graduate program and that you'd very much appreciate them writing an academic recommendation letter for you. Politely ask them if this is something that they would be willing to do for you. In most cases, they will be happy to help. Provide them with a copy of your transcripts. They may be able to write the letter entirely without your help, but I can assure you that they will very much appreciate any assistance you can offer that will help make their job easier.

If for some reason you can't see them in person, contact them by telephone and go through a similar process. Use email only as a last resort.

### *Question #4*

I need help writing an academic recommendation letter about myself for a school assignment. I'm not quite sure how to go about doing this. Can you offer me some good advice? Do you have any samples I can use as a guideline? I've searched for tips on Google, but could only find tips on writing reference letters for other people.

### *Answer #4*

The best advice I can offer you is to read the section of this book that talks about [contents of an academic recommendation letter](#). This should give you all the help you need to write an academic recommendation letter about yourself. There are also two [sample academic recommendation letters](#) included at the end of this book.

### *Question #5*

I'll be applying to law school next fall. I've been in the work force for 15 years and have been working on my undergrad on a part-time basis. I'll need at least two recommendation letters, and typically that's fulfilled through professors, but I think a professional recommendation letter is more reflective of my abilities and may make me seem more qualified and add to the diversity that law schools

say they seek. On the other hand, if they are interested strictly in my academic abilities and I don't fully address that issue, I'm afraid it won't make me competitive enough. Should I consider obtaining a recommendation letter from my employer, or do I need to get them both from past professors?

### *Answer #5*

In this case, you will **definitely** want to send two letters from your past professors, as that is what they are expecting when they ask for two academic recommendation letters. Law school admissions committees will be extremely suspicious if you only produce one letter regarding your academic abilities. However, you could consider adding a third letter from an employer.

Personally, I would give them exactly what they have requested. Admissions committees don't give "extra credit" for including things they don't ask for. Sometimes adding more information is seen as a disadvantage as it indicates that you either cannot follow directions or you believe that the specific directions don't apply to you.

In law school, as other graduate programs, admissions committees want to know how successful you will be in graduate school, plain and simple. You should pick the two best references you have who can best explain how you will be successful in their school. Usually, these will be your past professors.

An academic recommendation letter is **not** the place to demonstrate your diversity. I would certainly be open about the fact that you have been in the work force for the past 15 years and offer to provide them with a recommendation letter from your employer as well as the two that they requested.

# Character Reference Letters

## **What is a Character Reference Letter?**



A character reference letter is most often used for important non-employment and non-academic related pursuits.

If you are asked to provide a reference letter and you are not applying for a job, career advancement, or admission into a college or university, then the type of letter you will need is referred to a “Character Reference Letter.”

***“Also referred to as a Personal Reference or Personal Recommendation, a Character Reference Letter details a person’s positive personal attributes.”***

Character reference letters should focus on positive personality characteristics such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, values, dependability, work ethic, community service, and other widely accepted indicators of an individual’s character attributes.

These letters are almost always used by people who provide personal and domestic services, where trust is deemed as an important factor in the decision making process.

## **Character Reference Letters are Most Often Requested When Someone is:**

- Applying for Foster Care
- Attending a Parole Hearing
- Involved in a Child Custody Case

- Involved in a Court Hearing
- Seeking a Membership
- Seeking an Appointment
- Seeking a Home or Apartment
- Trying to Adopt a Child
- Up for a Nomination
- Up for an Award
- Required to Provide a General Personal Reference Letter

Often times a person will ask for a general character reference letter when they are leaving a company or service organization.

There are **six** main distinctions between an employment / academic recommendation letter (from your boss or college professor) and a character reference letter (from a friend).

1. Character reference letters are **less formal**.
2. Character reference letters are **more personalized**.
3. Character reference letters are usually **not** focused on an economic relationship.
4. Character reference letters are **subjective** in tone.
5. Character reference letters are more **straightforward**.
6. Character reference letters **can** be written by a family member.

An employment / academic recommendation letter is usually an official looking document. If it is from a past or current employer, the letter is normally printed on company letterhead. They are usually written in a formal tone and frequently follow a standard, rather impersonal format.

Character reference letters are not as appealing to hiring managers or admissions committees because the writer is usually a friend, neighbor or relative. This puts the reader at a disadvantage in two very important respects. First, they are not reading a report on verifiable work history. Second, a character reference letter is assumed to have been written to “pump up” those they recommend.

## Who Should Write a Character Reference Letter?

A character reference letter should be written by someone who knows the individual very well on a personal level and who is loyal to them, such as friends, neighbors, or family members. The writer should be someone who can best comment on the individual's strengths and positive qualities through long term personal contact.

The first people to be considered should be professional friends or acquaintances such as a doctors, teachers, lawyers, accountants, judges, government leaders, school system or hospital administrators, and community leaders? When a seasoned professional holds the individual in high regard, this will certainly increase their credentials and your chances at success.

With character reference letters, truly no one should be "excluded." You could also consider a teammate, fellow volunteer, educational mentors, members of the clergy, a personal physician, or even your veterinarian as a personal character reference.

## Contents of a Character Reference Letter

A well written character reference letter can be worth its weight in gold. In fact, it can be the most influential contribution to achieving the desired outcome.

It's important to understand that in addition to an individual being able to sell others on their good qualities and characteristics, they also need support from qualified people who are willing to support their candidacy. Having a third party confirm your positive attributes is critical to your success in attaining the desired outcome.

Prior to writing a reference letter, it's important to understand what the reader of the letter wants to get out of the letter. Refer to the section where we talk about the [four additional dynamics](#) that a great reference letter provides the reader.

With the following tips in mind, you will be able to create a meaningful character reference letter or advise someone on how to write one on your behalf:

- Character reference letters are often addressed generically, using, "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir / Madam." However, these days, it's extremely easy to obtain the names of people. I have a secret source that I use to do this all the time....it's called GOOGLE. So, show some initiative,

do a little research to find out the recipient's name and address the letter to them personally whenever possible. This is a very simple way to impress the reader of your letter!

- A character reference letter is simply a reflection of a person's character, experiences, skills, and associations with others.
- The character traits discussed in these letters should be objectively stated, but subjectively chosen. In other words, the good things should be included in the letter and the not-so-good things should be left out.
- For the most part, character reference letters **do not** pertain to an economic relationship, such as a job or career advancement. Nor are they used to gain admission into an institution of higher education. They are usually written less formally than these other two main types of reference letters. They are constructed in a **highly personalized** and **straightforward** manner.
- A character reference letter should provide **evidence** that the writer's high opinion of the individual is valid. This is best accomplished by recounting specific events concerning the person being referred to in the letter. In essence, the character reference letter should include one or more short, believable stories that the writer knows personally about the individual.
- The body of the letter should be a narrative that recounts one to three specific incidents regarding the individual. Again, these incidents should demonstrate his or her positive attributes. They should be examples of how he or she behaves in everyday life.

As a general guideline, these **four** important points should be considered when writing a character reference letter:

1. **Avoid** negative, ambiguous, tentative, or unflattering remarks. If you cannot do this, then do not write the letter.
2. **Include** verifiable observations that have been documented or can be substantiated.
3. **Avoid** comments about race, color, religion, handicap, sex, national origin, marital or parental status. In other words, do not include comments that could be interpreted as biased or that could provoke bias in any way.
4. Character reference letters should contain **evidence** of a variety of personal attributes and characteristics, such as the following:
  - Ambitious individual wanting to learn and grow

- Charming and lighthearted with a sense of humor
- Committed, loyal and devoted
- Considerate, caring and empathetic
- Courteous and polite
- Punctual and reliable
- Determined and persevering towards their goals
- Fair, honest and trustworthy
- Generous, giving and helpful
- Good leader
- Responsible person who is mature for their age
- Hardworking, diligent and industrious
- Intelligent person who is quick to learn
- Patient and level-headed
- Easygoing team player who is very people-oriented

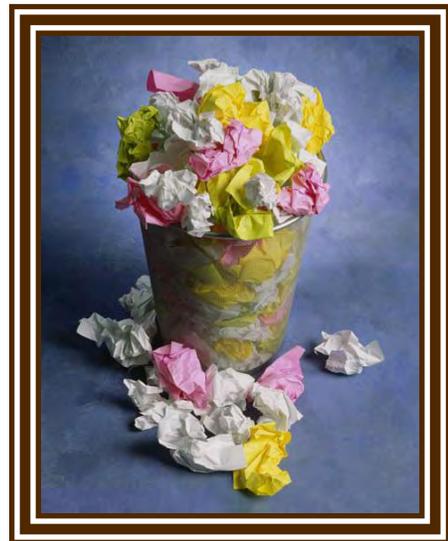
More **specifically**, you should carefully consider all of the following points in order to write the most effective character reference letter possible.

- The letter should start by explaining how you know the individual. In other words, state the nature of relationship you have with the person. Are they your friend, relative or neighbor? Are you their Doctor, Lawyer, Accountant? Are they a co-worker or a business acquaintance?
- Indicate how long you have known the individual. This helps the reader assess how well you know the person.
- Write the letter as though you were the one reading it. What is it that you would like to know as the reader of this personal character information? Whatever it is, include it in your letter.
- Focus on the personal achievements, qualities, and skills that are most likely to interest the reader or that most impress **you** about the person.

- Mention any shared experiences, such as coaching the same basketball team, singing in the church choir, or working on a project together at the office. Stay positive, honest and personal.
- Use personal stories or observations about your experiences with the applicant when appropriate. Objective facts are of course more important, but they must be balanced with personal reflections about the applicant.
- If you feel you can't honestly write positive things about the individual, you should politely refuse to write the letter.

Are you having trouble getting started or struggling with what to say in your reference letter?

Refer to the Sample [Character Reference Letter](#) in the Appendix at the end of this book.



## When to Use a Character Reference Letter to Obtain Employment or College Admission



Although a character reference letter is most often used for non-employment situations, they can prove useful in landing employment or college admission under certain circumstances.

A good character reference letter can be helpful when applying for a job or college admission in the following situations:

- The applicant lacks favorable references from current or former employers.
- The applicant is just starting out and has no prior work history or has been out of the job market for a long time.
- If the potential employer wants a better understanding of the applicant's background or a better understanding of what the individual is really like.
- If the applicant lacks favorable references from current or former college professors.
- If the applicant has not attended college and is therefore unable to obtain a recommendation from a past professor.
- If the applicant is seeking a position in which a particular set of personal characteristics are important.

For example, if the position is taking care of special-needs people, the hiring manager would be very interested in knowing that the applicant is great at dealing

with different types of people, particularly those with mental and/or physical handicaps. This is something that may not show up on a standard resume or in an employment reference letter.

## **Are You Seeking a House or Apartment?**

Another very common request for a character reference comes when you are seeking shelter for you and/or your family.

If you have a good track record of keeping your previous dwellings in good condition, then you're likely in the clear. Your best character references should come from your most recent landlords or loan institutions. With a good rental and/or financial history, you shouldn't have any problem acquiring a good character reference letter.

Remind the landlord, or whoever writes your letter, that you have an excellent record of paying your rent or mortgage and utilities on time; you always get along well with your neighbors; and there have never been any complaints. Particularly in rental situations, your letter should convey that you get along well with others in close proximity and that you can be trusted.

However, your prospective landlord is likely going to want more than that. These days it's very common for landlords and lenders to perform background and credit checks on new applicants, even if your character reference letter is stellar.

Although you may have a good idea about what your credit score is, you should be prepared to explain any deficient areas, if necessary. As long as you have a reasonable explanation and are able to show how you have taken steps to prevent a recurrence, you should be fine.

A great place to look for more ideas on what you could include in a character reference letter is right in front of you, on the rental application form. You'll discover different categories of information, each designed to give the landlord or loan company an idea about you as a prospective renter or homeowner. Look over the application form and think about the positive things you can say, then write them down and be sure to convey them as ideas or suggestions to your character reference letter writer.

Particularly in rental situations, it's always a good idea to ask the character reference letter writer to end the letter casually. Include an invitation to the landlord to contact him or her if they need more information or clarification about a certain statement.

# Character Reference Letter



One of the most common uses of a character reference letter is in a court situation, in which people must show a judge that they are decent, upstanding, hard-working citizens who need the court's understanding.

## *Question #1*

I need help writing a character reference letter for court. Is there a sample character reference letter that would be OK to submit to the presiding judge for consideration? The situation is this....a younger person in our community may have their driver's license cancelled and lose his apprenticeship because he was caught speeding. He is now fully employed and is participating in a skilled driver's course.

## *Answer #1*

You must first ask yourself, does the punishment fit the crime? Punishment may result in a loss of apprenticeship and transportation, which could lead to loss of the job (and this could potentially result in further crime). The crime committed was speeding. Was it at dangerous speeds? Does this person have other violations, showing that he has a habit of this?

As you stated, he is taking a driver's course to better himself, indicating that he has identified the problem on his own and is taking steps to correct it.

Your best bet is to start with the [sample character reference](#) letter at the end of this book and alter it to fit your needs regarding this individual. Add a line or two acknowledging the petty crime, and the honor with which the person is responding to it, by taking the driver's course. Conclude the letter with as many positive characteristics about the person that you know to be true.

## *Question #2*

I need a sample letter. It's for a negative character reference to use in court. My best friend is going to court to fight for full custody of her 1-year-old daughter. My friend's lawyer recommended that I write a negative character reference letter against her ex, as I have witnessed abuse over the years. Do you have an outline or sample of how this kind of letter should be written?

## *Answer #2*

Be brief, factual, and to the point. Don't include hearsay or slurs toward the ex (i.e., "he used beat her, **she told me** all the time"), because this indicates you didn't actually see it, and are just repeating what she said, so your letter would be tossed aside without a second glance. On the other hand, if you write, "On several occasions I personally witnessed (his name) physically abusing (her name)," then this is a statement of fact, gets straight to the point, and might actually get read.

## *Question #3*

Please help me compose a character reference letter. I need one that will be presented in court. I am about to adopt a child and they need a character reference signed by someone I know. The problem is that the people I have asked all want me to compose the letter and they just want to sign it. I can't compose a nice English letter because I'm from the Philippines.

## *Answer #3*

First of all you are not going to be judged on your "English". You will be judged first and foremost on your character.

If the people you have asked want you to put the letter together for them to sign, then that is totally fine. As long as they know you well enough and have agreed to vouch for the contents that you have included in your letter. They must be able to attest to its contents.

You need a letter that provides examples of your positive attributes and the good things that you have done in your life. A character reference letter that simply states that you are a nice, kind, good person just isn't enough. The court will want to hear some real examples of what defines you.

I would suggest that you start with the [sample character reference letter](#) contained at the end of this book as your guideline. I would then read the section above that talks about what things should be included in your letter. Review the section on [personal attributes and characteristics](#) and include the ones that apply to you.

Make sure to review the contents of your letter with each of the people who will be signing it to ensure that they are clear as to what you are saying and that they agree with you and will vouch for what you have written. Revise the letter if there are certain aspects that they do not agree with or don't know you well enough to comment on.

### *Question #4*

I need to write a character reference letter for my uncle, who is trying to obtain sole custody of his child. Do you have any suggestions or details on what the court might be interested in reading in this kind of letter? I'm not even sure the court will need this letter; I don't really think it will get that far, but my uncle asked, and I want to do anything and everything possible to help him. Any suggestions would be really appreciated. I tried to Google in search of sample character reference letters, but could not find any for this type of situation and I really would like to know what details would best benefit my uncle in the letter.

### *Answer #4*

The court and/or judge will want to know about his character. They want to know his work attitude, personal attributes, personality, reliability, etc.....this is all about your personal **opinion** of him.

I would suggest that you start with the [sample character reference letter](#) contained at the end of this book as your guideline. I would then read the section above that talks about what things should be included in your letter. Review the section on [personal attributes and characteristics](#) and include the ones that apply to your uncle. Be sure to include a section on how well your uncle interacts with his child.

Lay out all his personal attributes and characteristics as you see them, one paragraph per attribute. The final paragraph should sum up your overall opinion of your uncle.

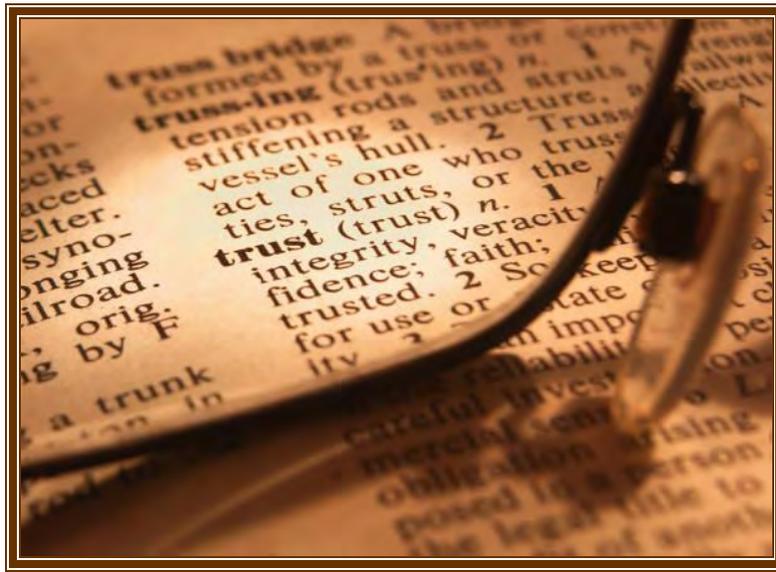
### *Question #5*

How do I write a character reference letter for someone charged with a minor offence? A very good friend of mine was recently arrested for shoplifting. It's completely out of character for her. She's going to court soon and her lawyer asked me to write a character reference letter for her. I don't know what to write. So far all I have written is how long I have known her and that she is a close and trusted friend. The fact that this is completely out of character for her makes it even harder to write this letter. She's a talented musician and an excellent student. (She's also my roommate.) I just have absolutely no clue what to write.

### *Answer #5*

Write exactly that! "She is a close and trusted friend who acted out of character. She has never been in trouble before." Also, ask them to please take into consideration her grades and musical talents.

Include that she is a remarkable woman who has erred and although she is willing to accept her punishment, to please consider an alternative to any possible jail time. Express your level of trust in her. Be truthful, honest and sincere.



# Thank You Letters

If you're the one who has had a Recommendation Letter or Reference Letter written for you, you should send a Thank You Letter or Note to those people who invested their time on your behalf, in pursuit of your desired future. When I say should, I mean that you **always** should.

You should send thank you letters to **both** the writer and reader of your recommendation letter or reference letter.

Both of these individuals have invested their time in you and your pursuits. Therefore, you should thank them both for their valuable time and consideration of you.

***“A recommendation letter or reference letter is an integral part of the application process, and the importance of saying Thank You to those people who invested their time to help you simply cannot be overstated.”***

## **Why Thank-You Letters are Absolutely Crucial**

First, and perhaps most obviously, it is common courtesy to thank people for whatever they do for you in life: we thank bank tellers, grocery checkout clerks, fast-food servers, and the person who holds the door or elevator for us.

What has always mystified me is that, so often, in the larger issues of our lives, people seem to take saying “Thank you” for granted. Why is this? Have we become so complacent, so lazy, or so “busy” that we can't sit down for 10 minutes and compose a few short paragraphs, expressing our thanks to someone who has helped us in such a way? Is it too hard to put a stamp on an envelope and drop it in the mail?

Sending a thank you letter to someone who takes the time out of his or her own life to attend to your needs, whether writing a reference letter or interviewing you for a job, is a gracious gesture on this person's part – and should be rewarded with your own sincere courtesy, a gesture of appreciation in the form of a thank you letter.

On another level, this thank you letter serves other purposes for you. Let's say the interview didn't go as well as you'd hoped. A great thank you letter is your

last chance to make up for that. You can use the letter to correct any negative impression that you may have left, add things that you meant to discuss but forgot, and to re-emphasize the key points in the interview that you want to make clear.

In the meantime, your potential employer, college or decision maker is thinking about several things. He or she is wondering, “Will this person fit in here, on both a social and professional level?” “How enthusiastic about this job, college or pursuit are they, really?” and “Does this person stand out from the rest of those I interviewed or not?”

Your job is to provide affirmative answers to those questions through a simple thank you letter! Then, even if you don’t get the job, for example, this employer will, nine times out of ten, remember you over the other candidates when **another** position becomes available for which you are qualified. You just can’t lose! Writing a thank you letter is a win-win situation!

So, don’t shoot yourself in the foot here. If you do an exceptional job getting out those recommendation letters or character reference letters to the ones who have requested them and then let all your efforts fall flat by not thanking the appropriate people who helped you achieve this, you’ve lost that perfect wave you were riding because of your own lack of attention to this one simple, yet all-important last detail of the process. If you get this far, don’t quit until you’ve said “thanks” to all those who deserve to hear it from you!

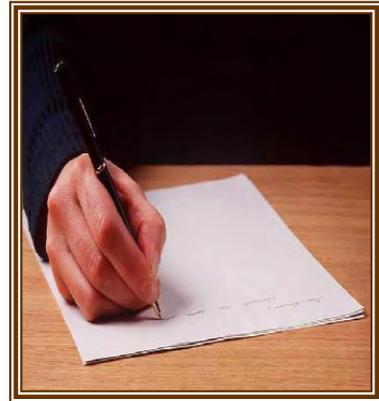


# How to Write a Great Thank You Letter

Although the two letters (writer and reader) are quite similar, they do have some minor differences. You will find the proper format for both of these types of letters in the next section of this book.

You should send your thank you letter within two days of your interview. It is actually best to put it in the mail the very same day.

The type of letter you want to send is dependent on your personality and your writing skills.” For example, hand written thank you letters are more personal than typed letters. But if you have poor writing skills, a typed letter is also very appropriate. I personally prefer to type mine as my handwriting is simply too messy for most people to read. If I had nicer penmanship I would most definitely **handwrite** my thank you letter.



You should use the same stationery that you used for your resume or your reference letter if possible. Plain, solid white or off-white is best.

If several people interviewed you, remember to thank each one of them individually.

***“Do not under any circumstances try to thank a group of people with one single letter!”***

Although personal in tone, your thank you letter should have a business like appearance if you decide to type it. Use standard business format such as single space each paragraph, placing a single, hard return between each paragraph, etc.

You want to include your phone number and any other contact information, such as your email address, at the end of the letter.

Always proofread your letter carefully. Look for misspelled, repeated, or misused words, and poor grammar. Because your eyes often miss sometimes the most blatant mistakes, it always helps to read the letter out loud. You’ll quickly find any problems with how the letter will sound to your reader.

Consider asking for an outside opinion from someone you trust such as your spouse, neighbor relative or friend. Have them read the letter and offer constructive feedback.

Are you having trouble getting started or struggling with what to say in your thank you letter?

Refer to the Sample [Thank You Letters](#) in the Appendix at the end of this book.



# General Layout of a Thank-You Letter

*Use this format to thank the writer of your reference letter*

## Opening

Your return address should be on the **top right** corner of the page.

The writer's name and address should go directly below your return address and on the **left hand** side of the page.

Your greeting to the recipient comes next. Always start with Dear \_\_\_\_\_: Always address the letter using their first name, **not** their last name and not their Professional Title. For example, Dear Bob:

## Body

On average, this section should be two paragraphs long.

In the first paragraph, extend your sincere thanks to the writer for meeting with you and for taking their time to write and sign your reference letter.

In the second paragraph, let them know the value of the letter that they wrote and the impact that it has on your pursuit. If applicable, let the writer know how their letter helped you land that dream job, gain admission into that desired college, or adopt a child, etc. The writer deserves to know how their efforts assisted you in achieving your goals.

If for whatever reason you were not successful in attaining your desired goal, you still must thank the writer for their efforts. If you cannot indicate that it resulted in you reaching your goal, you still need to thank them for their time and effort. Be polite, appreciative, sincere, and thankful to them for assisting you.

## Closing

The “close” comes immediately after your last “body” paragraph. You may use any of the typical closing words or phrases such as:

- Sincerely,
- Regards,
- Yours Truly,
- Very Truly Yours,
- Sincerely Yours,
- Cordially,

Enter several spaces, and then type your name. Sign your first and last name in the space between the close and your typed name.

*Use this format to thank the reader of your reference letter*

## **Opening**

Your return address should be on the **top right** corner of the page.

The name and address of the reader's company, college or organization should go directly below your return address and on the **left hand** side of the page. This is immediately followed by the word "**Attention:**" and the reader's name.

Your greeting to the recipient comes next. Always start with Dear Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_: Always address the letter using their last name, not their first name and **not** their professional title. For example, Dear Ms. Smith:

## **Body**

On average, this section should be three to four short paragraphs in length.

In the first paragraph, simply extend your sincere thanks to the reader for meeting with you for taking the time to read the documents you submitted.

In the second paragraph, you want to convey your excitement about the possibility of working for the company, attending the college, or raising your new adopted child. Refer to the date of your interview and the specific situation for which you were applying.

In the third paragraph, reiterate your main qualifications, attributes and skills. Tell them how you see yourself as an asset to their company, college,

organization or child's upbringing. Mention any memorable moments from your interview.

In the last paragraph, thank the reader once again for considering you. Repeat how you will benefit their company, college, organization, and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them soon. Let them know that you plan to contact them by a certain date and how you will contact them (i.e. phone, email, letter).

## **Closing**

The "close" comes immediately after your last "body" paragraph. You may use any of the typical closing words or phrases such as:

- Sincerely,
- Regards,
- Yours Truly,
- Very Truly Yours,
- Sincerely Yours,
- Cordially,

Enter several spaces, and then type your name. Sign your first and last name in the space between the close and your typed name.

Success! That's all there is to it!



# The Ultimate “Close”

Wait a minute – you didn’t think this was over, did you? Aren’t you forgetting something?

Remember earlier in the book, I mentioned that the purpose of a truly Great Reference Letter, Recommendation Letter or Character Reference Letter is to “sell” yourself? The goal is to promote your own unique talents, abilities, and positive characteristics.

The reality is that this business of “selling” yourself does not end with the Thank-You note. It doesn’t even end when you land that dream job, obtain admission to your favorite college or when you arrive home with that new bundle of joy. In fact, it never really ends. No matter what career path you follow, vocation you pursue or personal endeavor you are trying to achieve, the way that you sell yourself to others will be a HUGE part of your ongoing success or failure for the rest of your life. How’s that for a reality check?

No matter what your goal in life, you will always be in “self-sales.” Sure, reference letters “sell you” to potential employers, admission committees, landlords, judges, etc. But the reality is that the art of selling yourself is something you’ll be maintaining and updating for the rest of your life. No one gets what he or she wants just by showing up, right? You have to stand there and draw attention to yourself without appearing arrogant or boastful. Talk about walking a tight wire!

So here’s the bottom line: Whether you’re writing your first reference letter, starting a new job, entering college, adopting a child or seeking a membership the doors **never** “close” no matter what the situation - at least not if you want to keep moving forward!



The valuable tips contained within this book will assist you in **selling yourself** for the rest of your life!

# APPENDIX

## Sample Recommendation Letters and Reference Letters

In this section, you will find four sample reference Letters. These letters are meant to be used as **guidelines** only.

They are merely **examples** of **layout** and **content** and are provided as a guide to get you started planning your letter and thinking about what you will say and how you should say it.

[Your Name]  
[Street Address]  
[City, ST ZIP Code]  
December 14, 2008

[Recipient Name]  
[Title]  
[Company Name]  
[Street Address]  
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

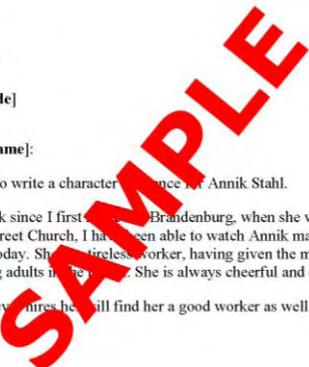
I am most pleased to write a character reference for Annik Stahl.

I have known Annik since I first met her in Brandenburg, when she was three years old. As rector of Elm Street Church, I have been able to watch Annik mature into the fine young lady she is today. She is a tireless worker, having given the most volunteer hours of any of our young adults in the church. She is always cheerful and dependable.

I am sure that whoever hires her will find her a good worker as well as a pleasant person. She is truly a gem.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]  
[Title]



## Sample Employment Recommendation Letter

February 12, 2010

Mr. Bill Johnson  
Manager, Marketing Services  
ABC Company Inc.  
123 Somewhere Street  
City, (State / Province) (Zip / Postal Code)

Dear Mr. Johnson:

It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend Mary Smith for the Senior Marketing position at ABC Company Inc.

Mary has worked under my direct supervision at XYZ Company for of the past eight years.

During that time, I have witnessed her steady growth from a Junior Marketing Trainee into a Senior Marketing Coordinator, the position she has held for the past three years with XYZ Company.

Mary is a hard-working, self-motivated employee. She intuitively understands the scope and magnitude of projects from the beginning, and how to get them completed quickly, efficiently and effectively. During her three years as Senior Marketing Coordinator, there was not a single time that she missed a major deadline. On several occasions Mary brought projects in below budget, and I can recall at least two major projects that she completed ahead of the scheduled deadline.

Ms. Smith is creative, resourceful, and solution-oriented. She frequently comes up with new and innovative approaches to the projects that have been assigned to her. She performs well in the role of project leader, as well as a team member on projects that are under the direction of other project leaders.

Mary has superior verbal and written communication skills. She gets along extremely well with all people and is highly respected by her peers, colleagues, employees, suppliers, and customers alike.

In closing, based on my experience working with Mary, I very strongly recommend that you consider Mary Smith for the position of Senior Marketing Agent. I am sure that you will be every bit as impressed with her as I have been.

If you would like discuss Mary's qualifications further, please feel free to call me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson  
Manager, Sales and Marketing  
XYZ Company Inc.

## **Sample Academic Recommendation Letter (Undergraduate)**

February 12, 2010

Ms. Patricia Williams  
Director of Admissions  
Admissions and Recruitment Office  
ABC University  
123 Somewhere Street  
City, (State / Province) (Zip / Postal Code)

Dear Ms. Williams:

It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend Jennifer Wilson for admission to your university program.

As her guidance counselor for the past four years, I have watched this young woman develop both personally and academically into a mature individual who is now quite ready for her college years.

Jennifer is energetic, intelligent, compassionate and very well-rounded. Her grades have been consistently well above average in all of her classes. She actively participates in a wide variety of extracurricular activities. She is currently involved in the athletic program, the drama club, the school band and she has been the president of the SRC for the past 2 years.

Jennifer also spends considerable time involved in community activities outside of school. This includes work with Meals on Wheels and volunteering at the shelter for abused women. The shelter is so impressed with Jennifer that they have offered her a paid internship for next summer.

While many of her fellow students are not sure which field they wish to pursue, Jennifer has been clear for quite some time now that her goal is to be involved in Social Work. Her love and desire for this type of work has been witnessed firsthand at XYZ High School with her tireless efforts in our pilot program for mentoring Special Education students, which she has eagerly been involved with since its inception three years ago.

In closing, I would like to share a situation which I believe speaks clearly about the nature of Jennifer's character. About a year ago I was heading for lunch when I came upon a crowd of students in the school parking lot. As I drew closer I could

see Jennifer, with her arms stretched out between two much larger male students -- one was a school bully and the other a Special Ed student. All of the other students were just standing by, watching, while Jennifer demonstrated her leadership and courage by putting herself in the middle of the arguing duo and thus preventing it from turning into an all out fist fight.

In my opinion, Jennifer Wilson is an exceptional individual who would contribute greatly to any university program. I wholeheartedly recommend Jennifer and wish her the very best in all her future endeavors.

If you would like discuss Jennifer's qualifications further, please feel free to call me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson  
Senior Counselor  
XYZ High School

## Sample Academic Recommendation Letter (Graduate)

February 12, 2010

Mr. Michael Anderson  
Director of Admissions  
Graduate Admissions and Recruitment Office  
ABC Institute  
123 Somewhere Street  
City, (State / Province) (Zip / Postal Code)

Dear Mr. Anderson:

It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to recommend Joseph Garcia for entrance into the Graduate program at ABC Institute.

I have known Joseph both personally and through work for the last eight years. He first worked with me as Junior Programmer in the software development department at an XYZ Company Inc. satellite office in Dallas, TX. Following his graduation from High-Tech Institute, I was fortunate enough to be able to follow his career such that when the opportunity arose, I was able to hire him into his current position at XYZ Company Inc.

Joseph brings commitment, energy, and enthusiasm to all of his activities. As a junior programmer, Joseph constantly delivers high-quality software within our organization. He is extremely intelligent and has a strong desire to learn -- attributes that will serve him well in graduate study.

Although Joseph is a junior member of our firm, he has quickly established himself as a "go-to" person in his field. He is always willing to work with all members of our team and to share his knowledge and expertise. He has excelled most notably as a presenter of new product development. He has a strong desire to be helpful along with a quick grasp of new and complex subject matter. These combined characteristics would serve Joseph very well in a teaching or instructor capacity.

I am also impressed with Joseph's wide and diversified range of interests outside of software. As an example, two of his interests are game theory and economics. You can often find him engaged in an in-depth discussion of the rationale behind EZ Pass, the lack of rationale in the stock market, or the optimal approach for making a few bucks on the World Series. Joseph's broad range of interests would serve him well as a researcher. He would bring a wide range of theory into research projects as well as offer new hypotheses of interest to the fellow researchers.

Joseph Garcia is a valued member of our company that we have come to rely on, regardless of the difficulty and challenges surrounding the task at hand. His combination of creativity, commitment, intelligence, perseverance, and compassion will no doubt make him a valuable member of any academic program. My personal recommendation is that you look favorably upon his application into your graduate program.

If you would like discuss Joseph's qualifications further, please feel free to call me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson  
Senior Technical Adviser  
XYZ Company

## **Sample Character Reference Letter (Court / Custody Hearing)**

February 12, 2010

Your Majesty  
Court of Queen's Bench  
123 Somewhere Street  
City, (State / Province) (Zip / Postal Code)

### **Re: Character Reference – John Smith**

It is a genuine pleasure and honor for me to provide a character reference for Mr. John Smith, whom I have known as a classmate, roommate, and friend for a period of five years.

I first met John in our freshman year at Virginia Tech. We were both enrolled in the computer science program, where we became acquainted through several classes that we both attended. By our second year we had become good friends and decided to move into an off-campus apartment together, a living arrangement that continued until we both graduated three years later.

Due to sharing classes and living arrangements with John for a number of years, I have gotten to know him extremely well. As such, I believe that I am in a very qualified position to provide you with an accurate assessment of his character.

As an academic, John was both hard-working and highly dedicated to his education. A review of his transcripts will most certainly confirm this fact. John was also very involved in numerous extra-curricular activities, including track-and-field and the school paper. In John's last two years at college, he was the Editor of the "Campus Inquirer." He is very outgoing, always willing to help someone out, and was very popular with his fellow students.

As a roommate, John was very neat and tidy at all times and insisted that everything in the apartment be kept neat and in its place. He cleaned both his room and the common living areas on a regular basis. He sometimes socialized at home but was always respectful of my needs by ensuring that he and his guests kept the noise down and ended their activities at a reasonable hour.

As a friend, John Smith is simply the best. He is honest, loyal, thoughtful of others, and very supportive. He always tries to see and understand things from the other person's perspective.

He communicates very well and knows how to raise and discuss issues and problems in a non-threatening fashion. He is a very sensitive person and is always tuned in to how others might be feeling in a given situation.

John also loves to have fun as witnessed during our school years, where we maintained an ongoing friendly rivalry on the racquetball court.

I honestly cannot think of anything of consequence that I could say negatively when it comes to John. Overall, I have to say that John Smith is a terrific, well-balanced man with an abundance of positive qualities. I am very proud to call him my trusted friend.

If you would like discuss Joseph's personal characteristics and attributes further, please feel free to call me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson  
Senior Programmer  
XYZ Company

## **Sample Thank You Letter to the “Writer”**

February 12, 2010

Dear Professor Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to write a reference letter on my behalf as I apply to graduate school. Your support of my pursuit of higher education is very much appreciated!

I realize that recommendation letters take a great deal of time, energy, and effort, and I appreciate your support throughout this process.

Your gracious words of praise and recommendation will most certainly have an impact on the admissions committee.

I will keep you updated about my progress in applying to graduate school.

Thank you for sharing in the process and writing on my behalf.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson

## Sample Thank You Letter to the “Reader”

February 12, 2010

Mr. Bill Johnson  
Manager, Marketing Services  
ABC Company Inc.  
123 Somewhere Street  
City, (State / Province) (Zip / Postal Code)

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Thank you so much for talking with me today about the position in the marketing team at ABC Company Inc. I was inspired by your knowledge of and dedication to the company.

After meeting with you and observing the company's operations, I am further convinced that my background and skills coincide well with your needs.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring to the position strong writing skills, assertiveness and the ability to encourage others to work cooperatively within the department. I will also bring excellent work habits and judgment to this position. With the countless demands on your time, I am sure that you require people who can be trusted to carry out their responsibilities with minimal supervision.

It has long been a goal of mine to work at ABC Company Inc. My previous experience as well as my education has prepared me well for this position. I am very excited about this opportunity.

I would like to take the next step in this process and discuss the position further with you at your office. I will contact you later this week to schedule a time when we can meet.

Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Lyle MacPherson  
Senior Marketing Officer  
XYZ Company