



## *Letters of Recommendation*

# **PROPER PROTOCOL**

**Create a folder. Write your name (maybe e-mail address, as well) on front. Place within the folder, organized in some manner, all of the items listed below. Typed is better than hand-written. Don't overdo it; "short & sweet" is the theme.**

- Up-to-date academic transcript showing course grades, overall GPA, class rank.
- List of AP and otherwise scholastically-challenging courses taken (inc. final grades and/or nat'l exam scores if applicable).
- ACT and/or SAT score(s).
- Probable major, field of study, area of interest in college. Be as specific as possible without stretching the truth. If "medicine" is as far as you can go, then OK. But if you could add, comfortably, "pediatrics" or "cancer research" that would be great.
- Short list of your most redeeming qualities. In other words, those 3-5 things about you that you believe *totally define you in the face of success as well as failure*.
- Brief account of significant co-curricular activities and community service. Assisting in Sunday school class twice during your junior year or refereeing one Saturday at the YMCA tournament do not count. *This is about genuine volunteerism.*
- List of colleges to receive the letter (plus accompanying forms). *Include deadline dates, addresses, etc. to eliminate any chance for misunderstanding.*
- Your e-mail address or some other best way to get in touch with you if there are questions. *Don't leave it up to your teacher to track you down somehow.*
- Use a hi-liter (preferably orange) to draw attention to those select items above that you are particularly proud about and which top your wish-list to be mentioned.

[OVER]

Do not submit any info you wish to keep quiet. If your ACT score is 12, then probably that is best kept on the DL. However, in some cases (you could talk with your evaluator about this) an isolated shortcoming could possibly be mentioned in such a manner that actually works in your favor.

*Always waive the right to access the information provided in the recommendation.* You simply have to trust that the person you requested to evaluate you will give you the kind of marks you want. If you have doubt, then perhaps you should seek recommendation from another person (listen to your inner voice). From the other side of the coin, I would consider it poor behavior for a teacher to agree to write a letter for you that was anything less than complimentary and supportive.

Deliver the folder of info to your prospective evaluators ASAP. Why not get it together during early September? As the year wears on, teachers have more and more business to accomplish. Give your teachers the courtesy of a huge time window to get this “right” for you. It’s not a ten-minute project. *At the barest of minimums, allow at least three weeks.* Approach your teachers with an absence of entitlement, such as, “Ms. Hanzel, would you feel comfortable writing a letter of recommendation for me?” Regardless of how exalted you think you are, your teachers, especially the ones you seek out for undertakings such as this, occupy a higher tier. Of course, the instructor has every right to deny your request. If this happens, you should be mature enough to realize that the teacher is actually doing you a favor because, for whatever reason, that person wouldn’t feel free to construct the kind of letter you want.

*Keep in touch with your people.* Stop in every so often as a “friendly reminder” or “courtesy call” without being a pest. If an application deadline is fast approaching, and you have not heard from your person, you should definitely find a diplomatic way to refresh that individual’s memory. Maybe you could ask, in some fashion, “Hey, Mr. Keck, is there anything else I need to get to you for my letter? It’s due next Thursday and I don’t want to leave you short of necessary information.” It is appropriate for the recommending teacher to confirm to the student when the task has been completed, so unless you’ve received such a notice don’t assume the job is finished.

Avoid subjecting your teachers to an e-mail Blitzkrieg of entrance applications and scholarship forms that might not be a good fit for some of your recommenders. To think that your people should robotically respond in a one-size-fits-all manner without any effort on your part to give them a quick “heads-up” or wave-of-the-hand expression of “hey, thanks again” is discourteous. Your history instructor isn’t qualified to comment on your musical talent; your science teacher probably doesn’t know about your summer employment; and so forth. So the result is that either the form isn’t filled out completely (not good) or it contains generic/reserved wording (also not good).

When the process is all “signed, sealed, and delivered” keep the teacher in mind as you continue through your senior year. *Probably your people agreed to take personal time to write you a swell letter because they have an interest about you.* The most precious thing I have to gift someone is my time. I give my life’s time away only to people I love (that would be family) and/or respect (that would include certain students). At some point down the line, your people might like to hear from you: “Guess what, Dr. Smith, I have good news and bad. The bad news is **Oregon State** turned me down, so I guess I won’t be a **Beaver**. But the good news is I was accepted to several junior colleges and Stanford. So thanks again for your time and effort.” You should cap this off (later in the school year is good “surprise” timing) with a genuine expression of appreciation—a sincere, hand-written note would be a great way to do this.

**When you think you’re ready to hand your completed folder to those individuals who will write you a nicey-nice letter, double check to be sure that you have completed EVERYTHING possible. Have you, for example, supplied your name, address, and other info on all forms?**