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## Recommendation and Reference Letter

Recommendation and reference letters are different in both audience and purpose. Recommendation letters are either written to a known recipient that has contacted you or to a recipient for whom you have been given the contact name and information. A reference letter is typically written for an unknown audience.

### 1. Ethical Considerations:

- A. You should only write a letter if you have first-hand knowledge of the applicant's skills or performance. If you do not work directly with that person, you should thoroughly research their performance and background before writing the letter.
- B. You must always be truthful.
- C. If you cannot give a good recommendation for a person, tell him or her that you are unavailable.

### 2. Conventions:

- A. Always ask for a copy of the subject's resume to use as a guide for your letter.
- B. Write the letter in the business format. (**Refer to the Formatting a Business Letter resource.**)
- C. Either mail the letter or send it via email as an attachment.
- D. The length is up to you; however, you must consider that people are busy and may read hundreds of letters a day, so write well, don't waste words, and try to keep to the business of recommending.
- E. Make sure you include a subject line ("Subject Line: Letter of recommendation for John Doe").

### 3. Components:

- A. **Introductory Paragraph:** In this paragraph you are providing information on your credibility and your relationship with the applicant.
  - I. Include your name and position.
  - II. Include the applicant's full name—this is important.
  - III. Provide the length of time and the context in which you have known the applicant.
- B. **Body Paragraph One:** This paragraph is all about the applicant. Include information on the following:
  - I. The applicant's professional qualifications—years of experience, credentials, awards, etc.
  - II. Specific examples of the applicant's accomplishments.
  - III. What sets the applicant apart from others who may be applying? Use specific examples.
- C. **Body Paragraph Two:** This paragraph addresses the skills and traits that specifically relate to the position for which the applicant is applying.



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- I. Do not mention characteristics that could be used to discriminate against the applicant, such as race, religion, nationality, age, appearance, marital status, disabilities, etc.
  - II. Skills that you should mention are communication (verbal and written) skills, intelligence, self-reliance, initiative, flexibility, willingness to accept responsibility, energy level, direction, interpersonal skills, ability to effectively handle conflict, teamwork, level of commitment, ability to lead, etc.
  - III. Emphasize the traits and skills that will speak to the position. Do not embellish or lie.
  - IV. Avoid phrases such as good, adequate, fair, reasonable, dependable, loyal, satisfactory etc.
  - V. Use words such as exceptional, significant, astute, articulate, versatile, creative, assertive, imaginative, qualified, dedicated, professional, dynamic, and innovative.
- D. Conclusion: This is where you end the letter with one last bid for the applicant.
- I. You might mention the applicant in a positive light one more time.
  - II. Restate your contact information for further assistance or information.
  - III. End in goodwill.
4. **Types of Recommendation Letters:** The two most common types of recommendation letters are related to employment and academic applications.
- A. An employment-related recommendation letter is requested by a company regarding an applicant.
    - I. The applicant has given your information to a company for the purpose of recommending him or her for a particular job.
    - II. These types of letters are positive and should be written by someone who has intimate or first-hand knowledge of the applicant's ability.
    - III. Typically you will have been in some supervisory position of the applicant so that you would have the credibility and objectivity to write a letter about a person's performance.
  - B. A college/university recommendation letter is for an applicant who is applying for undergraduate or graduate programs.
    - I. People who typically write this type of letter are former teachers, community leaders, faculty members, administrators, academic supervisors, or employers.
5. **Types of Reference Letters:** Reference letters are general and are typically addressed to an unknown audience. They provide basic job information: attendance, dates of employment, credentials, positions held, and ability to work well with others.
- A. A reference letter for a job applicant contains a positive statement that describes the person in a positive light. Typically, the applicant will submit these with his or her application letter.
  - B. Character references are written when a person may apply for child care or domestic work. This type of letter will reflect virtuous characteristics like honesty, trustworthiness, and dependability.



- 6. Intercompany Recommendations:** You may be called upon to write a letter that recommends a person for an award, a raise, or outstanding service.
- A. Commendation letters are often written by a fellow employee or by an immediate supervisor for the purpose of noting an employee's exemplary performance that went beyond what is expected.
    - I. These letters are often circulated between offices and are meant to nominate a person for an award or recognition of outstanding service.
    - II. This type of letter may also be used to recommend someone in a community for an award.
  - B. Performance evaluation letters are used to provide favorable critique of an employee.
    - I. They may be written by the employee's supervisors for the purpose of providing management with a critique of an employee's work performance.
    - II. They become a permanent part of the employee's record and are used to determine raises, promotions, etc.