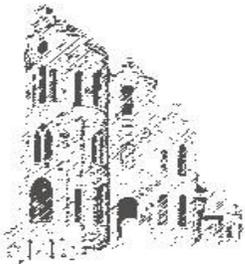


Robert R. McComsey Career Development Center



LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Alfred University
Alfred, NY 14802

Phone: 607-871-2164
Fax: 607-871-2791
www.alfred.edu/cdc - cdc@alfred.edu

Appointment Hours: 8:30-4:30 Mon, Tues & Fri
Walk-in Hours: 10:00-4:00 Wed & Thurs only

These documents are crucial pieces of the application process for education candidates, graduate/professional school applicants, grant/fellowship applicants, and more.

If you are REQUESTING that a letter is written on your behalf:

- ◆ Ask the writer if he or she can give you a **positive** recommendation, and be open to the fact that by asking you may receive a "no" as an answer. It is MUCH better to ask someone else than to have a less-than-stellar letter in your file.
- ◆ Put your request in writing, including the date by which you would like the letter completed. Last minute requests will probably not be honored - two weeks is more reasonable.
- ◆ Provide a copy of the position, or graduate school program, to which you are applying. If you are requesting a general letter, you should describe the type of position or program you are interested in.
- ◆ Provide the writer with a current copy of your resume. This will remind the writer of your unique talents, accomplishments, and experiences. If there are any qualities you would like emphasized, mention them to the writer so they can be considered.
- ◆ Give the writer an addressed envelope (stamped, if it needs to be mailed off campus).
- ◆ Make sure that all waivers are signed. Most graduate schools, and the service provided by the CDC, require that you either waive or do not waive your right to see the letter.
- ◆ Keep in mind that faculty and employers often have many letters to write. Before you ask that your credential file be sent out, call us at 607-871-2164 to be sure all your letters have been received.
- ◆ Thank the writer. He or she has given you a boost toward your career goal!

If you have been ASKED to write a recommendation letter:

The following items should be included in a written reference:

- ◆ The capacity in which you know or have supervised the person, including his or her job title if applicable, and how long you have known him or her.
- ◆ The **unique** qualities of the person as they apply to the position or graduate program, including academic ability, research ability, attitude toward study, potential as an original contributor to the field, dedication to the profession, creativity, ability to apply theory to practice, enthusiasm, etc.
- ◆ Concrete examples that demonstrate specific skills and achievements.
- ◆ Personal qualities of the candidate that indicate suitability for the opportunity, such as responsibility, ability to contribute to class discussions and development of other students, etc.
- ◆ Close with a clear sentence stating that you recommend the person for the opportunity and indicating your willingness to be contacted for further discussion.

Be aware of gender biases in your letter of reference:

- ◆ On average, reference letters for men are 16% longer and 2.5 times more likely to offer clear and strong language ensuring success.
- ◆ Letters for men are more likely to emphasize accomplishments while letters for women are 50% more likely to include adjectives that describe effort.
- ◆ Letters for women are seven times more likely to include personal information which is irrelevant (in most cases) for the position being considered.
- ◆ Adjectives like 'caring', 'compassionate', and 'helpful' are positive but are more common in letters for women and reinforce gender stereotypes
- ◆ Negative or irrelevant comments, such as 'challenging personality' or 'I have confidence that she will become better than average' are twice as common in letters for female applicants.
- ◆ *Adjectives to avoid:* caring, compassionate, hard-working, conscientious, dependable, diligent, dedicated. Tactful. Interpersonal, warm, helpful
- ◆ *Adjectives to include:* successful, excellent, accomplished, outstanding, skilled, knowledgeable, insightful, resourceful, confident, ambitious, independent, intellectual

Source: Trix, F & Psenka, C. Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society*, 2003; and Madera, JM, Hebl, MR, & Martin, RC. Gender and letters of Recommendation for Academia: Agentic and Communal Differences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2009.

Other considerations:

- ◆ CDC staff members will not divulge the contents of any letter to which the student has waived his or her right of access. However, we will let the student know if a letter is not suitable for a specific purpose; for example, we may indicate that a letter is targeted toward a fellowship rather than employment.
- ◆ If you do not feel you can write a positive letter, let the student know that. From his or her standpoint, it is better to have no letter than an even slightly negative one.
- ◆ Talk with the student about the qualities you feel that you can positively comment on, and let him or her know what you do not feel you can write positively about.
- ◆ Keep in mind that your letter may be photocopied many times. Use only the best quality printer or typewriter to produce your letter.
- ◆ Be sure you know what the student will be using the letter for, so that you can target your comments appropriately.
- ◆ Let the student know how long it will be until you complete the letter, and notify him or her when you have completed and mailed your letter.
- ◆ Contact the CDC if you would like an example of a letter of recommendation.