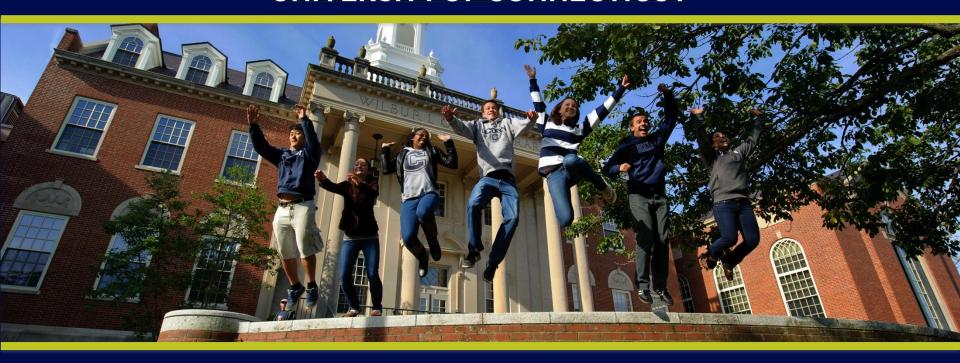
UCCONNECTICUT



Tips for Writing Letters of Recommendation Suzanne LaFleur CETL



- Challenges
- Communication
- Content
- unConscious Bias
- Code Words & Phrases
- Conclusions
- Sample letters from https://www.e-

education.psu.edu/writingrecommendationlettersonline

PennState
Sollege of Earth
Goldge of Ear

WRITING RECOMMENDATION LETTERS ONLINE





What types of letters are you usually asked to write?

What challenges you when writing letters of recommendation?





Can you write a strong letter for the applicant?

What are some things to consider?





- It is OK to say no.
 - Too close to the deadline
 - You know you don't have the time
 - You don't know the student well enough
 - You cannot be emphatically positive
 - Request is unprofessional
 - Adapted from https://funding.yale.edu/faculty-staff-recommenders/writing-letters





- Request Information
 - Deadline
 - Details about the request
 - Purpose
 - Program
 - Instructions criteria of competition
 - Recipient
 - Submission process





- Request Information
 - Current Materials
 - Resume
 - Personal statement
 - Details about related projects
 - Unofficial transcript
 - Bullet points of things to include





 Don't ask students to draft their own letters.





- Length
- Letterhead & Date
- Address & Greeting
- Text formatting
 - Font
 - 10 12
 - Standard publishing such as New Times Roman or Century
 - Single Space
 - Skip lines between paragraphs
- Closing

Adapted from https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingrecommendationlettersonline





What makes a strong letter?





Letter Content -- What makes a strong letter?

- Credibility
 - Explain how you know the applicant
 - Provide clear evidence
 - Limit your letter to what you know
- Focus on the applicant
 - Examples of what the applicant has done
 - Merits of the proposed research project, course of study, etc.
 - Positive impact on the student





Letter Content -- What makes a strong letter?

- Start strong
 - Executive summary
- Details & examples
- Avoid
 - Summarizing resume
 - Unsupported praise
 - Faint praise
 - Implying criticism



WHAT IS BIAS?

- Explicit Bias is attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level
- Unconscious/Implicit Bias is unintended, subtle, and subconscious thoughts that happen to all of us, all of the time

We'd like to believe we are openminded, fair, and without bias, but research shows otherwise. This is an important, even if uncomfortable, realization for most of us. " — MAHZARIN BANAJI Author, Blind Spots: Hidden Biases of Good People 13



- Trix & Penska (2003)
 - More "standout" adjectives for males
 - Differences in use of possessive phrases
 - Men researchers & professionals (his research)
 - Women teachers and students (her teaching)





- Madera, Helb, & Martin (2009)
 - Women described as more communal and with less agency
- Dutt, Pfaff, Bernstein, Dillard, & Block (2016)
 - Women half as likely to receive excellent letters





- Houser & Lemmons (2018)
 - Non-white students described with more affect words and positive emotions
 - White students described in terms of cognitive ability, insight, and productivity

- Gender bias calculator
 - slowe.github.io/genderbias



remale-blased (31%)



Graduate Student Janet letter

Female-biased (51%)

Female-associated words

Male-associated words

student ×8

course ×6

work $\times 3$

educational

Students $\times 2$

courses $\times 5$

classes

course,

class ×2

students,

responsibility ×2 students ×3

student-run

teaching

educational materials

workbook

thorough analysis

efforts. I

colleagues

working

project ×3

excellent

best

sciences

exceptionally

skills

able

projects

results

tested

capable

skills, focus,





Additional Code Words & Phrases

- Highest
 - "my highest recommendation"
 - "most enthusiastically and without reservations"
 - "very strongly"
- Strong
 - "strongly"
- Qualified
 - "I am writing to recommend..."
 - Adapted from www.umich.edu/ mmanty/resources/recommendations/html





Other considerations

- Define terms
- Privacy issues and FERPA
 - Refrain from referring to the student's protected classification information (e.g. race, national origin, religion, gender, physical disability, marital status and age)





Other considerations

Privacy issues and FERPA

- DO NOT share information from student educational records, including grades or grade point averages, with parents or others outside the institution, including in letters of recommendation, without written permission from the student.
 - https://ferpa.uconn.edu/forms/





 Talk to the student if you are considering using an example that may reveal personal information





- Consider posting your recommendation policy
- Consider a basic structure
 - Intro
 - Academic Substance
 - Character and personal examples
 - Summary





10 Commandments for Writing Recommendation Letters

• https://www.eeducation.psu.edu/writingrecommenda
tionlettersonline/node/31

