Letter of Recommendation Process

Dear Student:

Every year, teachers are asked to write letters of recommendation. These are provided as a courtesy. Teachers are not required to provide them. Writing a good letter is very time consuming and it is not uncommon to get 10-20 requests (or more) a year. My first request is please do not ask me to write you a letter if I have not known you for minimally 1 year. It puts me in an uncomfortable situation because I want to help students but in good faith, I can’t write a recommendation for someone I don’t know well. Also, please do not ask me to write a letter to a school that you would not go to if you are admitted. Sounds silly, you might think, but you would be amazed at how many students really do apply to schools they have no intention of attending. If you ask me to write a letter for you, ask in person but then follow up with a request in writing (via email) with the content requested in this letter. If you decide to ask me to write you a letter, think about what I might say about you. In the letter, I will tell the truth as I perceive it. Ask yourself, “Will Mrs. Raaker write me a good letter?” If I don’t know you that well or if I know things that would not present you in a good light, you might want to ask another teacher for a letter. For example, if I have seen you copying homework (or getting your homework back after letting someone else copy it), this does not reflect favorably on you (and I do keep track of these types of things). If you have habitually turned in poor quality work, or missed deadlines or let down a team, again, you may want to ask someone else. I only plan on writing a few good, high quality letters each year (about 5% of my students). If you ask me and I say yes, it does not mean that I will write a good letter, it just means that I will write a letter. In almost all cases, the letter will be a reflection of your conduct, effort and principles that I observed while you were my student. If your conduct was poor, your effort minimal and you behaved dishonorably, the letter will state this. Finally, I prefer to only write one letter per student so please store an electronic copy of the letter I write for you. If something comes up later and you wish to use it again, just let me know and I am happy to sign a copy for you. If you need to make modifications to alter the intent and purpose of the letter (such as changing the focus to a scholarship request rather than a college admission application), go ahead and make the required changes and then submit it to me for final approval and signature before sending.

A thank you card or letter should be written to any teacher who provides a recommendation letter. Gifts (like Starbucks or Jamba Juice 😊) are not frowned upon but are certainly not necessary. A heartfelt letter or card is far more valuable to me than anything. Teachers also appreciate knowing if you were admitted to and will attend the school for which the letter was written so please provide updates.

If I tell you that I will write your letter of recommendation, you will provide the following 2-3 short* paragraphs (written in third person). A paragraph that describes:

- academic qualities/achievement (such as: intelligent, dedicated, resilient, seeks a challenge, class rank, etc.)
- personal qualities (such as: kind, honest, polite, etc.).
- extra-curricular experiences Examples: sports, volunteer work, clubs, etc.
These paragraphs should be of a high enough quality that they can be used as they are written (ready to paste into the body of the final letter) and written from my perspective (third person). Put the paragraphs in the body of the email you send to me. Failure to provide the required paragraphs one month prior to the due date of the letter negates my agreement to write your letter. Usually, the ideas from the 3 paragraphs can be combined to make 2 cogent paragraphs. For example, leadership and dedication can be illustrated by writing about participation and leadership roles on a sports team. When possible, cite examples from your time in my class and/or DECA chapter. (Example, Served as project manager for the Talent Show or Competed at Nor Cal receiving top 8 honors and State taking 2nd place showed dramatic improvement, always was on time and worked hard, etc.). Activities (such as volunteer work, sports, church involvement), awards and obstacles overcome can be used to provide examples in the paragraphs. There is a list of questions/information below that will help you to remember things that you may want me to mention. Email the paragraphs to me when they are complete. The more time I have to write your letter, the more likely it will be well written, so give me as much time as possible, minimally one month.

Please also provide a list of the schools which will be sent letters and the due dates of the letters. If hard copies (and/or a questionnaire) are required, provide questionnaires and stamped, addressed envelopes with a post it stating the due date attached. Online submission is preferred, when possible.

**Questions/information to generate ideas for your Letter of Recommendation**
The following information and questions may give you ideas of things that you may want included in your letter and may enhance my ability to write a high quality letter of recommendation. Failure to provide adequate information minimizes my ability to write about you. If I can only write about what I personally know about you, the letter may be very brief and unflattering.

- Name, Student ID#, Social Security # (if required in letter)
- GPA
- SAT, ACT Scores (if worthy of mention)
- List honors and A.P. classes taken
- What are your immediate & ultimate educational goals?
- What career do you plan to ultimately pursue and/or what future goals do you have?
- What school clubs have you participated in?
- What sports have you participated in?
- What other school activities have you participated in?
- What have you done for the community?
- Have you received any academic awards?
- Have you received any sports awards?
- Awards that you received DECA?
- Have you received any community awards?
- Have you ever had a part time or full job?
Have you done any community service or volunteer work?
List unusual hobbies, interests, skills
Think about what you want me to say about you (no guarantees here) and think of adjectives that describe you, and incorporate them into your paragraphs. Examples: are you organized, are you a perfectionist, are you a natural leader, are you extremely ethical, how do you treat other people, do you go above and beyond the requirements. Do not exaggerate (lie) here or I will know something about you will not want me to write this letter.
Is there anything memorable about you, what you have done, or what have you accomplished that I may be forgetting about your time in my class? Colleges love this stuff. (examples: excellent projects, kind deeds, intelligent questions that you asked, discussions that we may have had etc.)
Have you overcome any obstacles that should be considered (family, language, physical, etc.)

If you have any questions, please let me know. It is an honor and privilege to write a letter for a student that has done some due diligence and put some “skin in the game” in this process and whose character and actions are worthy of my recommendation. If that’s you, please ask in person but then follow up with the requested content in writing (via email), minimally one month prior to needing the letter. Good luck with the admissions process.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Raaker