



# Writing Letters of Recommendation

WACAC SLC Conference  
March 26, 2013

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# What is admission looking for in a recommendation letter?

- Provide an **honest** assessment of the students' academic abilities and accomplishments and an assessment of their maturity and readiness for college.
- Use examples, highlight a particularly strong accomplishment.
- Tell us how well you know the student.
- If possible, personalize the letter to a particular college.

# What information should be shared and what shouldn't?

- Include extenuating circumstance if you have first-hand knowledge, include how the student has overcome the challenge.
- Comments that could be viewed as objectifying the student should be avoided, e.g. “Her porcelain doll-like face...”



# What constitutes a “bad” letter?



# How important is the letter?

- **VERY!** Letters go beyond class grades; by providing information about the student's abilities, critical thinking skills, time management skills, ability to deal with setbacks, maturity, leadership abilities, readiness for the four year college experience, etc.



# School Report Forms

## Ratings:

Below Average / Average / Good / Very Good / Excellent / Outstanding / One of the top few...

- Checking the boxes can be particularly helpful if you cannot write letters to a specific college. The checked boxes should apply to the particular college.
- Avoid checking “One of the top few...” for every box!
- If you do check off average or below average, include an explanation in your comments.

## I recommend this student:

No basis / With Reservation / Fairly Strongly / Strongly / Enthusiastically

# Do and Don't

 **Do** proofread every letter. Spell check is not sufficient. This will allow you to eliminate most of the don'ts!

- Avoids: "I have watched her mold and grow into a ..."

 **Don't** use the same letter for multiple students.

- We notice when name of student changes in the middle of the letter or pronouns are inconsistent!

 **Do** include brief information about yourself, e.g. number of years teaching, but

 **Don't** include your entire CV!


# Do and Don't

- ✔ **Do** include a particular activity or talent if you have personal knowledge of the activity/talent.
- ✘ **Don't** include the entire list of a student's activities.
  - We get this information from the student or the counselor's recommendation.
  
- ✔ **Do** provide the "why?" The stories and the examples.
- ✘ **Don't** use trite phrases.
  - I hope my daughter/son grows up to be just like Jordan.
  - I would trust Blake with my kids.
  
- ✔ **Do** try to keep the letter to one page.



# Advice from Admission Counselors:

“I always enjoy reading the “how they overcame” stories; mentioning a time a student struggled and when they went above and beyond to succeed, rather than the time things came naturally to them. And stories are always incredibly helpful – show not tell!”



“I look for letters of recommendation that evidence hard work and dedication to an area of study. It has nothing to do with perfect grades. Instead, it catches my eye when a teacher can attest that the student has engaged the teacher outside of the course and thought critically about the material they studied, especially if they truly have a passion for that subject. Leadership in a class, which is indicated by speaking up, generating novel questions and prompting critical dialogue from the group, is a tremendous indicator of ability to succeed at Mills. “



**Questions?**