

## Guidelines for Writing Recommendations for:

### Academic Graduate School

Indicate how long you have known the applicant and in what capacity. Graduate schools are primarily interested in recommendations that come from professors who know the applicant and his/her academic work as well as from employers. They are primarily interested in faculty members' summary estimates of the candidate's general promise as a graduate student. The more the recommendation reflects real knowledge of the applicant and his/her performance, the more useful the letter is to the graduate school admissions committees and thus to the applicant. The letter should address the following questions:

- **Intellectual characteristics:** How do you rate the applicant in overall intelligence? How well does the applicant learn and retain information? What is your assessment of the applicant's skill in analysis and logic? What is the applicant's ability to deal with complex or abstract matters? Does the applicant show evidence of creativity? Has the applicant's academic record been affected by special circumstances such as work, social or academic background?
- **Knowledge of field of study:** What is the applicant's depth and breadth of knowledge in the field? Does he/she know how to use the methods in the field of study or have the experience in research? Where applicable, does the applicant have the requisite laboratory techniques?
- **Ability to communicate:** Is the applicant an effective writer? Does the written work submitted demonstrate a mastery of the convention of English? Is the written material clear, well-organized and forceful? Is the applicant articulate in oral expression?
- **Industry and self-discipline:** To what extent is the applicant persistent, efficient and motivated? Is the applicant able to work independently? Is there any reason to doubt the applicant's commitment to graduate study or diligence as a student?
- **Personal effectiveness:** Does the applicant possess the qualities of maturity and personal adjustment requisite for graduate study? Would you choose the applicant for graduate study under your tutelage? Does the applicant enjoy the trust and respect of fellow students and peers?
- **Potential for graduate study:** What is your prediction of the applicant's probable performance in graduate school? Does he/she have any specialized skill or studies in the field? Does the applicant have an aptitude for the chosen field? How does this applicant rate with other candidates who have been evaluated?

### Business School

Business schools are primarily interested in recommendations from professors who know the applicant and his/her academic work, as well as from employers. Note: Schools which usually only accept applicants with several years or more of full-time experience often place greater importance on letters from employers. They are interested in summary estimates of the applicant's general promise as a student of business. The more the evaluation reflects real knowledge of the applicant and his/her performance, the more useful the letter is to the business school admissions committees and thus to the applicant. The letter should address the following:

- **Interpersonal skills and leadership ability:** How effective is the candidate in establishing and maintaining relationships? How well does he or she work with and/or through supervisors, peers and subordinates? How do you assess the applicant's ability to lead, ability to delegate responsibility, sensitivity to those less competent and potential for future success as an administrator? Has the applicant demonstrated willingness to work in a team environment?
- **Personal achievements:** Has the applicant sought or created opportunities to make use of his or her native ability and how effectively has he/she exploited it? How do the applicant's achievements compare to those of his/her peers?

- **Candidate's insight into his or her own assets and liabilities:** Will the applicant accept constructive criticism? Will he/she accept a challenge with self-confidence, admit mistakes and ask for help when needed?
- **Intellectual qualifications:** What is your assessment of the applicant's analytical skills and ability to grasp new ideas? Has the applicant's academic record been affected by any special circumstances such as work or academic background? Does the applicant have the ability to apply his/her knowledge creatively?
- **Ability to communicate:** Is the applicant an effective writer? Does the written work submitted demonstrate a mastery of the conventions of English? Is the written material clear, well-organized and forceful? Is the applicant articulate in oral expression?
- **Industry and self-discipline:** To what extent does the applicant possess the traits of persistence, efficiency and motivation? Is there any reason to doubt the applicant's diligence as a student?
- **Potential for the study of business:** What is your prediction of the applicant's probable performance in the study of business? How well do you think the applicant has thought out plans for graduate study? Among others recommended for business school, how does this candidate rate?
- Is there any other information about the applicant which you would like to share with admissions committees?

## Law School

Law schools are primarily interested in recommendations that come from professors who know the student and his/her academic work, as well as from employers who can write about the factors noted below. They are interested in summary estimates of the candidate's general promise as a student of law. The more the evaluation reflects real knowledge of the student and his/her performance, the more useful the letter is to the law school's admissions committee and thus to the student. Indicate how long you have known the applicant and in what capacity. It should address the following questions:

- **Personal effectiveness:** Is the applicant the kind of person you would choose to consult as a lawyer? Does the applicant enjoy the trust and respect of professors and fellow students?
- **Intellectual qualifications:** What is your assessment of the applicant's analytical skills and ability to grasp new ideas? Has the applicant's academic record been affected by any special circumstances such as work, social or academic background? What is the applicant's ability to deal with complex or abstract matters?
- **Ability to communicate:** Is the applicant an effective writer? Does the written work submitted demonstrate a mastery of the conventions of English? Is the written expression clear, well-organized and forceful? Is the applicant articulate in oral expression?
- **Industry and self-discipline:** To what extent does the applicant possess the traits of persistence, efficiency and motivation? Is there any reason to doubt the applicant's commitment to law study or the applicant's diligence as a student?
- **Potential for the study of law:** What is your prediction of the applicant's probable performance in the study of law? Would the applicant stand in the top quarter, near mid-class or simply make the grade in a rigorous program? Do you have any special familiarity with the process of legal education?
- Is there any other information about the applicant which you would like to share with admissions committees?

## Health Professions Schools

Health professions schools are interested in recommendations which come from professors, research supervisors, etc., who know the student and his/her academic work well. The more the evaluation reflects real knowledge of the student and his/her performance, the more useful the letter is to both the school and the student. Letters which say little more than what the student received for a grade are of very limited

value. Comments which help to put the student's performance in perspective and make clear the letter writer's opportunity to evaluate the student are very helpful. For example, comments concerning the grading scale or the level at which the class is taught may make your evaluation more meaningful. Health professions schools desire your opinion on the following:

- **Academic ability:** Characteristics to be rated might include intelligence, how well a student learns and retains information, skill in expressing ideas in oral and written form, ability to deal with complex or abstract matters, evidence of creativity, interest in the subject matter of the course, ability to work independently, laboratory skills and techniques if appropriate.
- **Personality traits:** Please comment on the applicant's dependability, sincerity, integrity, relations with others, personal adjustment, maturity, initiative, and motivation for a health profession. The applicant's weaknesses as well as strengths should also be pointed out.
- **Knowledge and suitability for intended profession (if known):** Schools often place great importance on the applicant having a clear understanding of the intended field from direct experience. When possible, comment on the applicant's exposure to the realities of the career field and the applicant's suitability for the profession.
- **Overall potential:** Summary judgments which rank the applicant with past and present candidates are desired.

## Medical School

**Your letter makes a difference.** Many of the medical schools that receive large number of Cal student applications must choose from among more than 5,000 applicants to matriculate 120 medical students. The insight that you provide in your letter of evaluation is essential to the admissions committee making decisions in this difficult selection process.

**Your letter is part of a packet of letters.** Cal medical school applicants should have three substantial letters, two from science instructors and one from a humanities instructor. Some schools will accept additional letters. The cover sheet for letters sent to medical schools from the Letter Service indicates that Cal does not have a pre-professional committee or ranking system and that students individually solicit letters from faculty.

**Medical schools are looking for insight you, the letter writer, can give about this particular person, and especially seek your opinion in the following areas:**

- **Intellectual readiness:** Include comments about general intelligence, the student's oral and written communication skills, ability to deal with complex and abstract ideas, evidence of being a lifelong independent learner. A letter that merely states the grade earned by an applicant in your class has very limited value. Can this person handle the load of medical school?
- **Motivation for medicine:** If you have some knowledge of the student's experiences learning about medicine or experiences with volunteer work in a health care setting, comment on the applicant's exposure to the realities of medicine.
- **Maturity:** Your impressions of this person as someone who has the integrity and emotional maturity to take on responsibility. Do you think this student could discuss intimate or sensitive topics with a variety of people? Is this someone you would trust to care for you or a loved one?
- **Difficulty of course work or major:** It is helpful to explain how this student measures up with past and present candidates and to provide a context for their performance. If you have the impression that the bioengineering major is especially demanding for particular reasons, explain this as you make your remarks about a bioengineering major. If you have never seen a sociology major perform so well in your upper division biochemistry course, write this observation.
- **Special attributes and assets:** Have you noticed the student often helps others in the hallway while waiting for class to start? Express your opinions and share any observations that illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the student.

**It is the student's right to decide if the letter is confidential or non-confidential.** Some may discuss this with you. Many medical school admissions officers have stated that they find a confidential letter a display of confidence on the part of the applicant. Because the law has changed, the Letter Service is now required to indicate on the letter if it is confidential or non-confidential.

**It is a good idea to use the pronoun "we" in a co-signed letter.** If a GSI will write the letter, and a professor will "co-sign", it is best if the letter is written using the term "we", as in "we saw that Mr. Thorpe became more engaged as the class time included poetry readings".