

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES (OSSEO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL)

What is a letter of recommendation? Admission to any institute of higher learning usually requires one or more letters of recommendation. These letters provide the admissions committee with information not found in the application--information that shows the applicant matches the school's expectations and requirements. The letter also provides an opportunity for an applicant to be seen as an individual, and helps him or her to stand out from the hundreds or thousands of other applicants.

It is important that the person providing the recommendation has a good understanding of your academic history, interests, goals, and direction. Normally, this type of recommendation letter is addressed to a specific person and should be submitted along with the admission application or as outlined in the admissions procedure. In many cases, accredited universities require that letters of recommendation be sent directly to specific departments or to the admissions office. If this is the case, the applicant may be required to sign a waiver of confidentiality and relinquish his or her right to access the information contained in the letter or forms.

Academic letters of recommendation may contain evidence or confirmation of the following:

- Academic performance
- Honors and awards
- Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.
- Willingness to follow school policy
- Ability to work with others
- Ability to work independently

The Letter Writer. Choose who will represent you wisely. No one person can represent you accurately in all areas. Find someone who knows your strengths in the areas you need to satisfy the requirements of a particular scholarship or admissions board. Schedule a convenient time for you and the letter writer to meet. Review the requirements and expectations of the recommendation letter. This process helps the person who is writing the letter answer questions, clarify points that may need elaboration, and point out additional information that may be required. Make this process easy by providing all of the information needed so that you can obtain an accurate and positive recommendation.

When you request a recommendation, communicate your needs in a straightforward way. Explain what you are applying for and ask if the person can provide you with a good recommendation. If someone exhibits any uneasiness about providing you with a strong recommendation, be polite, thank him or her for their time and then look elsewhere. Choose someone who:

- can provide a well-written letter
- knows you well enough to be credible
- thinks highly of you and your abilities
- holds a respected position

Keep in mind that the recommender is doing you a favor and has a busy schedule with other commitments. Make sure you allow enough time so that he or she can provide you with a well-written and effective letter.

OSH teachers typically request the following when requesting a letter of recommendation (be sure to ask the person you are requesting a letter of recommendation from how they would like to handle the letter):

- Be sure to ask teachers for the letter politely
- Allow teachers a good window of time for completing this task – a 2 week window seems safe
- Ask verbally but also hand them this request in writing – we're busy people!
- Give the teacher the form, with any student required sections already completed
- Also provide a stamped addressed envelope. Teachers should have the option to mail these directly to the college or scholarship committee rather than giving them back to students
- Follow it up with a thank you note! Teachers spend many hours on these to make them personal and appropriate.
- Although your teachers know you very well, they have many other students and have had lots of students and don't necessarily recall all that you have done while in high school. Provide them with a printed list of your activities while in high school so that they can speak accurately about your accomplishments (possibly provide a copy of your data sheet).