

Letters of Support Webinar Handout

Minute Mentor Series for Women Faculty

Writing Letters of Support of Women Colleagues: Specifics, Subtexts, & Stereotypes

October 8, 2019

Tips for requesting a letter:

- Consider a formal written request;
- Provide the deadline/due date and enough lead time for writer to comply;
- Include the name/address of person/institution to whom letter should be written;
- Provide a description of position/program to which requester is applying
- Supply any specific forms/instructions;
- Provide an up-to-date CV and portfolio if applicable;
- Consider giving suggestions about letter emphasis, including activities/accomplishments;
- Include a summary of your career goals.

Sample Simple Letter Template*:

- The opening indicates general but not excessive warmth. What is this letter is about? "I am pleased to provide this letter of support for _____."
- Include a brief description of your institution, position, role, and relationship with the letter requestor.
- Highlight relevant CV and portfolio accomplishments. Do not re-list, but do provide personal (witnessed) anecdotes. Contextualize work in terms of scope, importance, and promise. Details not obvious from CV/portfolio.
- Briefly remark about the person's character, & professionalism
- Summarize your recommendations. Use a key summary statement.
- Save a copy for future use or as a template.

*<https://www.mlo-online.com/home/article/13003199/an-educators-scoop-on-asking-for-or-writing-a-recommendation>

Basic Expectations**:

- Two solid single-spaced pages
- Letterhead (not email)
- No gushing or waxing emotional, but positive
- Provide specific examples, evidence, examples, broader context; not vague generalities
- Avoid stereotypical and/or gushing adjectives (incredible, remarkable, extraordinary, awesome, amazing...) vs. standout adjectives
- No faint praise ("she is one of the better ones"), doubt raisers;
- Use summary statements, "I highly recommend," "I give my highest recommendation."

**<https://theprofessorisin.com/2016/09/07/how-to-write-a-recommendation-letter/>

Tips:

- Letter writers, keep a copy of your recommendation on file in the event that another request is made. Using a previous letter as a guide is easier than beginning from scratch.

Examples of Categories of Doubt Raisers***:

Negative language

While she has a somewhat challenging personality
While she has not done a lot of bench research

Hedges

It appears that her health and personal life are stable
She appears to be highly motivated

Unexplained

Now that she has chosen to leave the laboratory

Faint praise

She worked hard on projects that she accepted
I have every confidence that Bill will become better than average

Irrelevancy

She is quite close to my wife
He is very active in church

***From Trix & Psenka. Exploring the Color of Glass: Letters of recommendation for female medical faculty. Discourse and Society. 2003;14(2)191-220.

<https://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/exploring-the-color-of-glass.pdf>

Possible Gender Bias Adjectives to Avoid	Adjectives to Use (Standout)
caring	successful
compassionate	excellent
Hardworking (grindstone adjective)	accomplished
conscientious	outstanding
Dependable (grindstone adjective)	skilled
Diligent (grindstone adjective)	knowledgeable
Dedicated (grindstone adjective)	Insightful
tactful	resourceful
warm	confident
interpersonal	Independent
helpful	intellectual

Commission on the Status of Women:

https://csw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/avoiding_gender_bias_in_letter_of_reference_writing.pdf?fbclid=IwAR122CWkF9kaYNKD1ogcrkFWyzGqs6yndQaZtRHp7H4rQD7Zov9-SnyAW6c

Minute Mentor Panel and Facilitators -- October 8, 2019

Panelists:

Deborah Bradshaw, MD
Lynn Cleary, MD
Patricia Kane, PhD
Margaret Turk, MD

Facilitators:

Ann Botash, MD
Elizabeth Nelsen, MD