

Writing a Letter of Recommendation for Law School



CENTER FOR
Pre-Law Advising
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

What is the Goal of a Letter of Recommendation?

One of the aims of the law school admissions process is to identify those individuals who have the intellectual and personal characteristics necessary to succeed in the law school classroom. To determine capacity to succeed, law schools rely on a variety of proxies including undergraduate GPA, LSAT score, and letters of recommendation.

As someone providing a letter of recommendation, it would be most useful for you to identify academic and other characteristics that you have observed in the applicant that indicate the capacity to succeed in law school. Specifically, the Law School Admissions Council requests that you address several of "the applicant's... qualities of mind and character, dedication, responsibility, and readiness for the rigors of advanced academic study." Qualities of mind and other relevant qualities could include:

Intellectual Capacity

If you taught the applicant, did he/she get a good grade? Is the applicant analytical, intellectually curious, capable of thinking abstractly? Does the applicant demonstrate strong critical thinking and reading skills? Reasoning skills?

Ability to Communicate

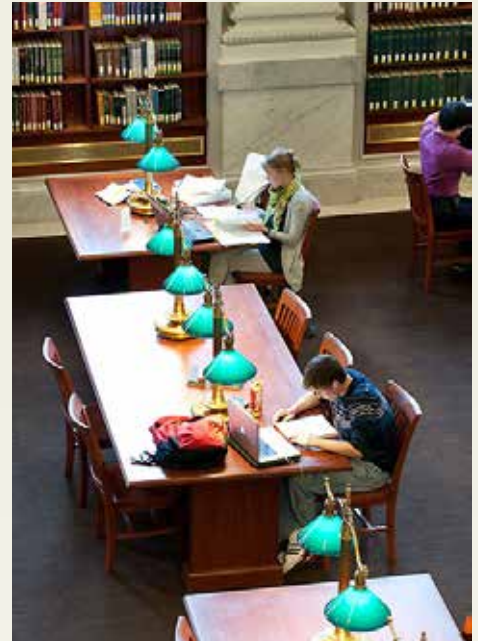
Does the applicant have strong writing and/or verbal skills? Does the applicant participate often in class discussions? Is the applicant articulate and persuasive in his or her communications?

Other Characteristics

Is the applicant particularly motivated, diligent, mature, organized, responsible, attentive to detail, professional, self-disciplined, or trustworthy? Does the applicant have strong character/ integrity? Leadership skills? Does the applicant rise to challenges or achieve beyond expectations?

For those characteristics that you have observed in the applicant, try to provide examples of one or more times when the applicant demonstrated the identified characteristics.

To the extent that you are qualified to assess the applicant's overall potential for the study of law or for rigorous advanced coursework, such assessments may also be useful.



This guidance is intended for academics and professionals who have been asked to submit a letter of recommendation on behalf of a law school applicant. Please note that family members or family friends are not ideal sources for letters of recommendation.

Writing a Letter of Recommendation for Law School Continued



DOs and DON'Ts When Writing Letters of Recommendation

DO:

- Provide context for how you know the applicant and how long you have known the applicant.
- If you taught the applicant, provide information on the nature of the class(es). Was the course particularly demanding? What was required of students in the course?
- Be specific. Provide examples of times that you observed relevant characteristics. Refer to specific work product if possible (e.g., thesis, research project, significant writings, presentations).
- Evaluate the applicant in general relation to other classmates or employees (top 10 percent, etc.). To the extent possible, quantify the applicant's strengths.

DON'T:

- Don't speak in generalities. Vague statements are not useful to admissions committees.
- Don't merely recite the applicant's résumé in narrative form. The applicant will submit a résumé as part of the application.
- If you supervise the applicant, don't focus on trade-specific skills. Instead, focus on the applicant's broader skill sets—how the applicant thinks and communicates and whether the applicant has other qualities mentioned on page 1.
- Don't agree to write a letter if you do not believe that you have a sufficient basis on which to evaluate the applicant.



How to Submit a Law School Letter of Recommendation

The Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) serves as a central hub for the law school admissions process and is the intermediary between academic or professional individuals who draft letters of recommendation and the law schools to which an applicant has applied. All letters of recommendation on behalf of a law school applicant must be submitted formally to LSAC through one of the following two procedures:

■ Electronic Process

If an applicant has elected to solicit letters of recommendation through LSAC's electronic process, the applicant will request LSAC to contact you via e-mail to invite you to submit your letter electronically. The applicant should have contacted you personally first in order to determine your willingness to provide a letter. After receiving the e-mail from LSAC, you will create an LSAC account if you have not previously done so. The procedure for creating an account and the process for submitting the letter will be laid out in the e-mail from LSAC.

■ U.S. Mail Process

For those writers of letters of recommendation who are not comfortable submitting a letter electronically, there is a paper option. If you prefer this method, the applicant should print and give you a form that you must enclose with the letter of recommendation in a mailing to LSAC. The address to which you should send the letter and form is provided on the form itself.