



HOW TO BE A GOOD REFERENCE

It is appropriate to write a letter of recommendations for

- Those seeking a promotion or tenure
- Those applying for a job opening
- Those you have directly supervised
- Those who believe you know and value their work best

If you are inexperienced, ask a senior manager or faculty for advice.

Be aware of the following:

- The job candidate may worry if you give a letter that is reasonable but not an outstanding recommendation.
- Give a clear and precise picture.
- Explain the context of the candidate's accomplishments or research and give a sense of how that work will contribute to a given job or field.
- Establish the candidate's contribution: Explain what a discipline or your department would have been like if the candidate had never contributed to it.
- Remember that the person you are recommending is competing with other applicants who are highly recommended for the same job. Therefore, any letter without the highest recommendations can look halfhearted.
- A statement to hint a consideration of a candidate's weakness is a kiss of death. Avoid the temptation to go there.
- Make it positive to leave a good impression of the Job candidate because your letter is the last piece of information to greatly impact the review process.
- Make the letter as concrete as possible by establishing yourself as an objective authority figure, stating your relationship to the Job

applicant and the precise description of the applicant's work, performance, competencies, and style of working with others.

- Details help to give a rationale and substance. Yes, the candidate is the greatest but why is s/he special and/or the most suitable candidate for the job?
- Ask the job candidate to provide useful materials like an updated resume, a recent research paper or writing sample, latest performance evaluation, and/or a copy of the job description to assist with having a point of reference.
- You are rendering a professional service to the job candidate and the search committee/the hiring manager that evaluates the candidate.
- Don't write a positive letter of recommendation if you can't do so honestly.
- A letter to recommend hire focuses more on competency, scholarly or exceptional contribution and performance potentials.
- A letter to recommend focuses on objectively evaluating the work the job candidate has already completed with 40% praise and 60% objective assessment of strengths and weaknesses (an evaluation of impacts, competencies, performance and most important achievements.)
- The critical comments could give tenure committee a reason to decline a promotion.
- Don't leave the reviewers with more questions and many ways of interpreting your comments. Avoid the following:

1. "I am thrilled to provide a reference for Jon Doe, whom I trained and with whom I thereafter collaborated for many years."

The reviewer: The candidate was to secure a letter from an objective observer. This won't cut it. You must establish your relationship as an objective expert.

2. "Jon Doe deserves this promotion because he has done 20 workshops and 5 papers on this topic last year."

The reviewer: We can count but are you too lazy to read and evaluate the papers? It is best to read a paper or attend a workshop to directly evaluate and praise the quality of the work and performance rather than the quantity.

3. "Jon Doe is really considered to be a remarkable employee."

Reviewer: It would be nice if you could tell us if he is remarkably good or remarkably bad? You can use concise and quantitative measure of performance and contributions to validate `remarkable.'

4. "Jon Doe meets the highest standards of professionalism and all around, he has a great character."

Reviewer: What is the relevance of this to achievement? Please follow with an example to demonstrate the standard of performance you are referring to.

- The letter will need to be free of sexual, racial, and cultural biases. Avoid writing longer letters for male candidates. Try not to use stronger words like "outstanding," "excellent," and "superb," for male applicants than for female applicants. Men and women can equally be `professionals' and `authority figures.'
- Balance compliments with factual, actual, and potential contributions you believe the job candidate can make in a new role.
- A thoughtful and well-written letter of recommendation will assist the candidate but will enhance your reputation and credibility as well.