



WCD LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION: A BRIEF GUIDE

You've asked WCD for a letter of recommendation

Now you want to know what to do next. This guide tells you.

Deadlines: Allow 2 Months

A lot of students don't realize how busy their professors are.

A great deal of the work professors do in addition to teaching – refereeing books for scholarly presses, writing reviews, sitting on tenure committees as outside reviewers at other universities, preparing their own books and articles for press, etc – is invisible to undergraduates. When you ask a professor for a letter of recommendation, it pays to look at things from the faculty member's point of view.

The rule: if you are going to ask a professor for a letter of recommendation, do so ***at least two (2) months before the recommendation will be due***. The reason: even if the professor agrees to write for you on a shorter deadline, the result will be a hasty and perfunctory letter. That won't help you much.

Materials

WCD only writes letters for students he can support wholeheartedly. (He suggests to others that another faculty member will be able to do them more good.)

If you've gotten this sheet, there has been a "yes." You're now responsible for getting the following materials to WCD in good time for him to review them before writing your letter:

- 1) Rutgers transcript
- 2) Test scores (LSAT, GRE, MCAT, etc) with percentile rating for your sitting of the test.
- 3) A copy of any essay you will be submitting as part of the admissions process.
- 4) Copy of the best essay you handed in for a WCD class
- 5) The "Mommy Letter"

What is the "Mommy Letter"

This gives WCD the detailed information necessary to write you the strongest possible letter on your behalf.

The fiction: pretend you are your own mother bragging about your own accomplishments to another mother. (Mothers do this, which is how the letter got its name.)

In the Mommy Letter, give me details about any positive accomplishments – outside activities, special talents, personal history – that will help me make you come alive on the page as a person.

The "Mommy fiction" is intended to get you over the self-consciousness that always attends praising yourself. Mommies tend to talk glowingly about their kids to other mommies. Pretend you are your mother.

Outside activities. This is important because the Mommy Letter almost always tells me things I didn't know about even students whom I've come to know very well personally.

Here's an example. One student who asked me for a letter had had *five* courses with me.

Still, it was only through her Mommy Letter that I discovered that she had spent two consecutive summers in high school working in a poverty-stricken village in Central America building a school for rural children. It was a dramatic story: kidnappings and violence in that area by rival drug gangs, tropical diseases that required some American volunteers to be removed by helicopter, hard manual labor in a torrid climate while laying cinder blocks in a hardpan soil, teaching villagers how to improve sanitation and hygiene on the side, etc.

You can imagine how vivid I was able to make all this in a letter for the student. Still, I never would have known a thing about it – she was a modest young person, and never mentioned her own outside accomplishments – except for the Mommy Letter.

The Packet

When you give me your packet of materials, do so in a folder with your name and specific needs on the outside: "John Q. Smith, Law School Recommendations." Make sure *all* materials are included.

Waive your right to confidentiality

In fact, I always give students a copy of any letter I write for them. (As I say above, I simply don't write letters for students I can't back wholeheartedly.)

Still, you should always check that box that says you "waive confidentiality" on the recommendation. This is because admissions committees, if they think the letter is being written "for the eyes of the student" (and parents), don't take it seriously.

TYPE your envelopes, provide stamps

Some letters go directly to schools. Some go to clearing houses like the Law School Admissions Council. Some go back to the candidate with WCD's name written across the back to prevent tampering.

For any envelope that is not pre-addressed, you should *type the address* to which it is to go on the outside. Also a return address in case it miscarries. You should always provide adequate postage on each item to be sent.

(A professor who has to run around finding a 34¢ stamp to send *your* materials will not be a happy professor. He or she will not be in a good mood when writing your letter. You want your professors to be in a good mood. Treating them as your secretary is not a way to achieve this.)

Now deliver the packet to WCD. You've done your part.