

CCS College Planning

Recommendation Letter Cheat Sheet

Guidelines for students requesting recommendations:

How do I start?

Read your college application carefully and slowly! Make sure you understand what that college is asking for and the deadlines the Admissions Office has set (early acceptance deadlines, scholarship/financial aid deadlines, regular application deadlines, etc.). Keep a calendar or notebook with this information, and make notes of who you ask for recommendations, when you asked him/her, and when you should double-check that he/she has sent the recommendation to your college (before your deadline!).

Who should I ask?

Think about who knows you and can attest to the quality of your work. If you need a recommendation from a teacher, request one from a teacher in an academic subject who knows your strengths. That may be a teacher in whose class you've gotten top grades, but it could also be a teacher who knows how hard you've worked to get B's and C's. Try to get teachers of core classes, not electives, if possible.

How many recommendations should I get?

Most colleges/scholarships require two recommendations. If you need three recommendations – one from a counselor, an academic teacher, and another person – consider requesting one from someone who knows you well: a coach, employer, adult co-worker, or religious or youth group leader, or an adult in the community with whom you have had regular and positive contact.

How much do recommendation letters count?

It is very unlikely that recommendations will get a “C” student admitted to a college that accepts only “A” and “B+” students. However, teacher and counselor recommendations will influence final decisions often. In many cases, the recommendation will confirm information contained in other parts of the application. Recommendations count the most in “close calls” because they highlight students’ intellectual qualities and illuminate other facets of personality and character traits that will add to the college community. (p. 5-9, *College Counseling Sourcebook, 7th Edition*)

Ask the person if that individual would be willing to write a letter for you. Remember, the person is doing you a favor. Ask in a way that provides him/her with a way to decline comfortably if he/she does not have time to do a good job: “Do you feel you know me well enough, and have enough time, to write a letter of recommendation for me?”

Should I waive my right to view the letter?

On the application form, waive your right to view recommendation letters. This gives more credibility to the recommendation in the eyes of the college.

How can I help my recommendation writer?

Submit information about important deadlines for the letter, information about yourself (this cheat sheet, for example), the college recommendation form (if there is one), and other pertinent information to the writer at least *two weeks* before it needs to be completed. Remember, the deadline is the last possible day the letter/application may be received by the admissions or scholarship committee, not the day you put it in the mail. Make sure you give your recommendation writer plenty of time to do a thorough and thoughtful job! **DO NOT WAIT TIL THE DAY BEFORE THE DEADLINE!**

Politely follow up with your writer to make sure the letter was mailed. Write a brief thank-you note to the writer.

If you receive the scholarship or are accepted to the college for which the letter was written, let the writer know. Let your counselor know when you have a response from the college or scholarship committee, one way or the other.

College Board Annual 2012 Survey:

Which criteria most admissions officers consider to be the most reliable indicators of success in college?

School achievement	83%
Test scores	86%
Recommendations	47%
Essay*	46%
Interview*	29%
Activities	31%

*When required

CCS College Planning Recommendation Letter Cheat Sheet

Instructions for this form:

Use this form to assist your teachers and counselor in writing recommendation letters for your college & scholarship applications. Once you complete it, you can also use it when you fill out your college applications and write essays. Expect to spend 3-4 hours on this task, which should result in a document of 3-8 pages.

You can print this form out to complete it by hand or copy and paste the questions into a Word document and type your answers. The second method is more efficient in case you need to make changes later or need to email a digital copy to your teachers or counselor. **Tip:** Add your last name to the file name so you can search for it easily if you “misplace” it (Example: Choplin- Recommendation Letter Cheat Sheet.docx).

Name:		Date:	
College(s) or scholarship(s) to which you are applying and sending this letter.			
School Activities: List the activities in which you have participated, the number of years & the amount of time per week you spent, and what you have gained or learned from each activity. Consider artistic, athletic, literary, community service, and leadership positions. Estimate your time the best you can.			
School Activities	# of Years	Amt. of Time/Week	What I Gained or Learned

CCS College Planning
Recommendation Letter Cheat Sheet

Which activity was the most important to you? Explain why.

What do you consider your most important activities outside of school? List jobs, paid or voluntary; religious activities; hobbies; travel; music; art; and drama. Include the number of years of your involvement and the amount of time you spend on the activity weekly, and explain why this activity was significant to you.

Outside Activities	# of Years	Amt. of Time/Week	Why This Activity Was Significant to Me

In or out of school, which **awards and honors** have you received? Which **elected offices** have you held?

Which **book(s)** have had the greatest impact on you? Why?

CCS College Planning
Recommendation Letter Cheat Sheet

Describe the **academic accomplishment** (major paper, science experiment, artistic project, etc.) you are most proud of, and tell **why you take pride** in it.

What **kind of learner** are you? Which **academic setting or assignments** make you thrive? What **interests** you?

List your **three most distinguishing or most admirable qualities**. Explain each in several sentences.

What do you **hope to accomplish** in college and after? Consider your **career goals** and your broader goals.

Add more pages if you need additional space!

Adapted/slightly modified from
College Counseling Sourcebook, 7th Edition. © 2012. The College Board.