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## NS&FP Guide to Writing Strong Letters of Recommendation

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Letters of recommendation are a critical component of successful applications for prestigious awards, providing important information for the selection committee unavailable elsewhere in the application.

### Considering Requests for Recommendations

- Consider whether you can write a letter that provides strong support for the student making the request, given the specific selection criteria for the award for which she/ he is applying
- Say no to a request for a letter of recommendation if:
  - You do not know the student well enough to provide the kind of in-depth letter requisite for a prestigious scholarship application
  - You do not feel the student has adequate preparation or meets the criteria for the award of interest
  - The student has not provided you with enough time before the deadline to write a strong letter
    - Students are advised to request letters at least a month in advance, with sensitivity to summer and holiday schedules
- If you can't provide a student with a strong letter, you can offer advice on approaching a more appropriate reference

### Composing Recommendations

- NS&FP provides award-specific information and advice on letters of recommendation to students, which we encourage them to share with potential recommenders
  - Information about awards, including selection criteria and descriptions of award opportunities, is available on our website
  - NS&FP staff are happy to talk with you about specific award details and what makes strong recommendations for specific awards
    - Contact us by email at [oue.nationalawards@emory.edu](mailto:oue.nationalawards@emory.edu) or by phone at (404)727-6069
- Review the materials the applicant provides you (e.g. information about the award, résumé/ CV, essay drafts, etc.)
- Letters should be written with the specific scholarship opportunity in mind, addressing the applicant's strengths, abilities, and experiences, as they relate to the specific award for which the student is applying
- Questions to consider as you are writing:
  - How did the student translate their coursework into research, internship, or other relevant experiences?
  - How has the student developed over the duration of your relationship?
  - How will the student contribute to their proposed field based on the contributions the student has already made?
  - Has the student demonstrated superior critical thinking skills, analytical ability, verbal and written communication skills, originality, intellectual curiosity, leadership ability, research potential, etc.?
  - How do the candidate's personal qualities complement her or his goals?
  - How do the candidate's abilities and experience prepare her or him for the particular award at hand?
- Provide context of how you know the applicant (classes, research, work, extracurricular, etc.), and for how long you have known her/ him
- Place the student in a larger context, providing a specific comparison (e.g. to other students in the major, to other students who have applied for this award)
  - If possible, include quantitative remarks or percentages (e.g. "this student is among the best three I have taught," "top 5% of students in my 10 years of teaching"), etc.

- Describe why the applicant is a strong candidate for this particular award, providing specific examples
- Thoroughly address each of the selection criteria for the award for which the student is applying
  - Fulbright, for example, looks for candidates with ambassadorial potential, Truman looks for candidates committed to public service, and Goldwater looks for candidates committed to scientific research
- Augment rather than repeat information contained elsewhere in the application, particularly in the applicant's résumé
- Letters should be between one and two single-spaced pages, and on letterhead, unless otherwise noted
- Extremely brief letters—usually those shorter than two paragraphs—can convey disinterest or lack of support and be harmful to a candidate's prospects, however positive the evaluation contained within
- Address your letter to the committee as a whole (e.g. "Dear Truman Scholarship Selection Committee")
- Close with your signature (you may insert your signature digitally, or print, sign, and scan), and your full title (e.g. "Assistant Professor of Economics" rather than simply "Assistant Professor")

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**National Scholarships & Fellowships Program**

<http://nationalawards.college.emory.edu/>

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