

Letters of Recommendation: Impact on College Admissions in a Pandemic



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Test
Optional...



...or Test
Blind?

COVID-19 Information



COVID-19's
Impact on High
School Seniors



COVID-19 Admissions Information

WSU's COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 Update



UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS

VISIT / APPLY / COSTS & FINANCIAL AID / ACADEMICS / STUDENT

Read more about how COVID-19 is impacting admission on our [FAQ page](#).



COVID-19 ADMISSION FAQ ▶

TEST OPTIONAL SCHOOLS
**FOR FALL 2021
ADMISSIONS**

OVER HALF of
ALL 4-year
schools are now
test optional
for 2021!



Go to menti.com



Mentimeter

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The code is found on the screen in front of you

In the past...

Check out the results of the [2017 NACAC "State of College Admission" survey](#):

TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in College Prep Courses	216	76.9%	12.5%	9.3%	1.4%
Grades in All Courses	218	77.1	13.8	6.4	2.8
Strength of Curriculum	218	51.8	35.3	7.3	5.5
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	219	54.3	27.9	13.7	4.1
Essay or Writing Sample	217	18.9	35.9	22.1	23.0
Counselor Recommendation	213	14.6	46.0	25.8	13.6
Student's Demonstrated Interest	212	13.7	25.5	32.1	28.8
→ Teacher Recommendation	211	10.9	46.4	28.0	14.7
Class Rank	217	9.2	24.0	34.6	32.3
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	216	6.9	30.6	30.6	31.9
Portfolio	210	6.2	5.7	27.6	60.5
Extracurricular Activities	214	7.9	36.0	36.9	19.2
SAT II Scores	212	2.4	6.1	21.2	70.3
Interview	213	4.7	17.4	31.9	46.0
State Graduation Exam Scores	210	1.9	7.6	21.9	68.6
Work	211	2.8	15.6	47.4	34.1

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016

Why is it important?

- A well-crafted teacher recommendation letter can make a difference for your student.
- Your letter matters! Especially now!
 - Test optional vs. test blind
 - Teacher/staff insight characterizing student as a learner even virtually
 - Student activities/community service etc. were interrupted
 - Show student empathy and persistence
 - Opportunity to showcase unique qualities of student
- Tell their story – what makes them truly unique

Does anyone actually *read* the letter?

Yes!

- Your letter will be read sometimes by multiple admissions reps at each school.
- It does bear weight on their admission decision
- Send letters if they are requested
- Do not send letters to all schools “just to be safe”

LOR Do's:

- **Tell a story.** It's the character stuff that they want to hear from you
- **Pick specific descriptors** and back them up with evidence; avoid clichés like “hard-working,” “passionate,” and “team-player.”
- **Ask permission** if you're going to reveal something private about the student (they have a learning disability, their mother has cancer, they struggle with depression).

LOR Don'ts:

- **Feel obligated** – Make sure you feel you can represent student well
- **Repeat a student's resume** - Admissions counselors get a copy of that, too.
- **Recycle letters** - High schools are grouped and the readers get five of the same thing. It does your students zero favors if you are not writing them individual letters.
- **Be too general** – Especially when students are applying to a particular program or school for specific reasons.

General vs. Specific

- Letter of recommendation for a college = **SPECIFIC**
- Letter of recommendation for a scholarship = **More General**

(*New)Organized Narrative Structure:

Introduction – (Hook) Paint a picture of the student and the context for how you know them.

Body – Discuss things such as interactions with peers and adults, work in your classroom, significant things you will remember about the student, how student reacted to challenges or setbacks, provide evidence and examples of personal qualities, relevant outside activities.

Final Recommendation/Conclusion - This is the part where you wrap things up in sentence or two and write just how much you recommend the student.

To Whom It May Concern:

Introduction

1. Hook: Start with a simile/metaphor, an absolute statement, a surprising fact, a colorful characterization, or a specific story.
2. The first line should provide the full name of the person that you are recommending.
3. State how long you have known the student and in what context.

Body (Choose ideas from below based on your knowledge of the student and what “fits.”)

- **Discuss the student’s work in your classroom.**
 1. Provide context if it was in person vs. virtual
 2. If it was during spring of 2020, how did student transition/persist?
 3. Is it timely, organized, creative, thorough, neat, insightful, unusual?
- **Describe how the student interacts with peers and adults/learning environment.**
 1. Are they respected by peers? Do they choose to associate with good people? Do they have good people skills?
 2. Do people, especially adults, trust them?
 3. Are they kind/sympathetic/considerate?
 4. Leadership: Do they lead by example or do they take charge? Do they work well in small groups? Participate actively and/or respectfully in whole class discussion? Work well independently? Understand how to break down complex tasks? Suggest modifications to assignments that make them more meaningful? Support students who have a more challenging time?
- **Describe the things that you will remember about the student.**
 1. Go beyond diligence and intelligence: Talk about humor, courage, kindness, patience, enthusiasm, curiosity, flexibility, aesthetics, independence, courtesy, stubbornness, creativity, etc.
 2. ALWAYS talk about work ethic if you can.
 3. ALWAYS talk about integrity, at least in passing, if you can.
 4. Unique qualities, or what sets them apart as an individual are good. What makes them who they are? It’s good to talk about how a student deals with being different or deals with adversity if relevant.
 5. Talk about why you will remember them.
- **Describe how the student reacts to setbacks/challenges/feedback.**
 1. Detail any academic or personal obstacles overcome.
 2. How do they handle academic challenges? How do they advocate for themselves? Did the student make growth over time? Explain what the student did to make it happen.
 3. Do they teach themselves? Do they monitor their own learning? Do they apply feedback/learn from mistakes?
 4. What challenges in their personal life have they encountered? Are challenges on going, due to crisis, or significant events?
- **Provide evidence and examples of personal qualities.**
 1. Physical descriptions can be very useful here as a way to make students (who may look like everyone else on paper) memorable: bright smile, walks with a purpose, silent observer etc.

2. Think about anecdotes the student has told about their lives, ways they describe themselves
3. Reference significant instances/interactions in class, projects or academic work, especially those that set a new bar for the class.
4. Identify the student’s engagement, level of work, and learning style in your class.

- **Include only first-hand knowledge of extracurricular involvement. No lists, please. With extracurricular activities halted in spring 2020 this information can fill in additional context.**

1. Extracurriculars only matter because they show something about the student — a passion, a skill, a talent. The extracurricular is going away — what will they take with them? What will they bring to campus?
2. Extracurricular achievements are best used as examples to demonstrate earlier points, not as a goal/paragraph in themselves.
3. Think beyond the activity itself — think about reacting to setbacks, supporting team members, organizing events, making suggestions that changed how the team/group did things, setting an example, and growth over time.

Conclusion

1. Begin with an unequivocal statement of recommendation. “[Full Name] carries my strongest recommendation.”
2. State what the student will bring to an institution (NOT why the student deserves acceptance).
3. Summarize the student’s qualities, character, and accomplishments that you wish to emphasize.
4. End with an emotional comment — that you will miss them, that you have learned from them, that you are sorry to see them go, that they are your favorite, etc.

LOR Process

Student Process:

- Complete Brag Sheet Survey
- Make request for college letter in Naviance
- Monitor request in Naviance

Staff Process:

- Access Student Brag Sheet Survey in Naviance
- Complete Common App LOR in Naviance
- Additional requests (scholarships/college needs more info) = send
- Monitor request in Naviance

What if I have questions?

Students & Staff

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