

## Guidelines for Asking for Recommendation Letters

The teacher/counselor recommendation form is a part of every scholarship application and many college admission applications as well. Most of us who've watched you grow are happy to do this for you, BUT you need to do your part to make the process go smoothly. In plain, hopefully not-too-offensive terms, that means you must

- Ask the right person. You need to choose someone who knows you and your strengths and who can put you in the best possible light. You may be having a great time in your new math class, but if you've only been in class 3 weeks, your teacher probably doesn't know enough specifics about you to do the job you need. Don't get your feelings hurt if s/he tells you to choose someone else.
- Ask with plenty of time to spare. *Maybe I wasn't clear on that point:* **ASK WITH PLENTY OF TIME TO SPARE.** Everybody in the senior class needs his/her recommendation letters before leaving for Christmas. And I'm always amazed at the number of students (and their parents) who wait until two days before we get out -- on the first morning of semester exams -- to send me an "Oh, by the way, I need a recommendation letter" request. And then they (and, yes, their parents) are miffed because I won't have it ready at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> period. Be sure you understand this:

**Failure to plan on your part does NOT create an emergency on our part.**

That, dear ones, is a life lesson. I must have a minimum of 2 WEEKS NOTICE to get a good recommendation done. If I can get it done before that, great. But others are on the calendar ahead of you. Give me the time I need, or be prepared for me to say, "Sorry, I'm not able to do that for you right now." (*This is especially true for getting your counselor's recommendation. I have 130 students. Every counselor has about 500, each of them special. Get in line.*)

- Know what's required for the recommendation. If your application just says, "Submit a teacher recommendation," say that. But if it wants me to focus on your leadership skills, your response to setbacks, or your creativity, I need to know that up front.
- Know what's unique about you. These schools already have your resume; I'd like to tell them about what they don't see on the resume. You can help me out with this by telling me if there's something specific you want me to mention. Maybe you worked on a particular project for a long time and were pleased by the result. I'd like to tell them about that.
- Please understand: I do not address envelopes or lick stamps – or even buy stamps. If you want me to drop it in the mail for you, have the envelope already filled out with a stamp on it.
- Finally (and this is also a life skill) **take the time to say "Thank You"** to the people who write recommendations for you. When you go to compete in the job market, a handwritten note in genuine English – not text-speak or lowercase e-mail language – is such an important part of the interview follow-up process. Well, start that habit now. Say it AND write it (and for the really special ones, send a T-Shirt from your college once you get there.) Chocolate is always a nice "thank-you," too.

Seriously, writing these recommendations is one of the very best parts of my job, and seeing students get that acceptance letter is something I'll never get tired of. Do your part to make the process work well.