

Asking for Letters of Recommendation

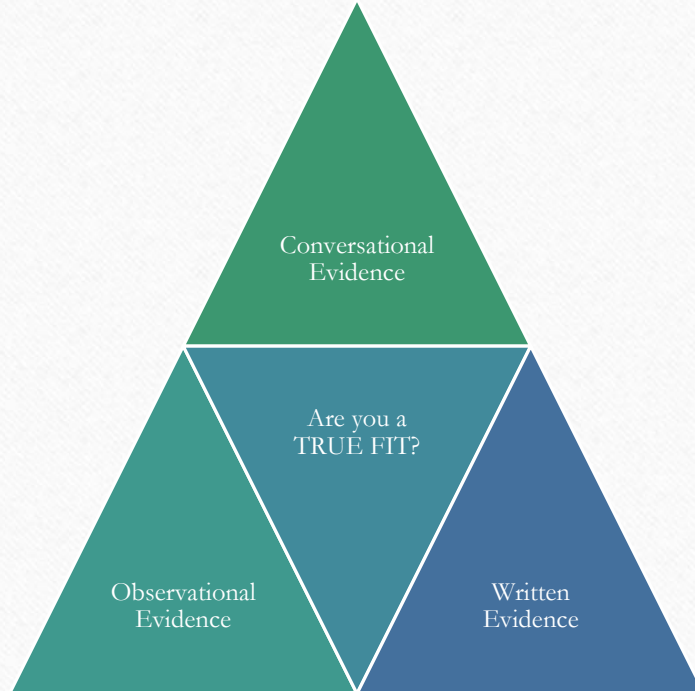
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Yee Han Chu PhD MSSW

Goals

- LOR Purpose
- Sample LORs
- Tips for an Effective LOR
- Action Steps
- Draft Email

What is the Purpose?



- These letters serve a very important purpose in the application process: they allow professors and other mentors – such as internship or community service supervisors, athletic coaches, research supervisors – to share their first-hand impressions about the qualities that **make you distinctive** intellectually, personally and/or professionally.

How is a LOR for a Scholarship different from a LOR for Graduate School?

Graduate School

- Emphasis on Academic or Professional Promise

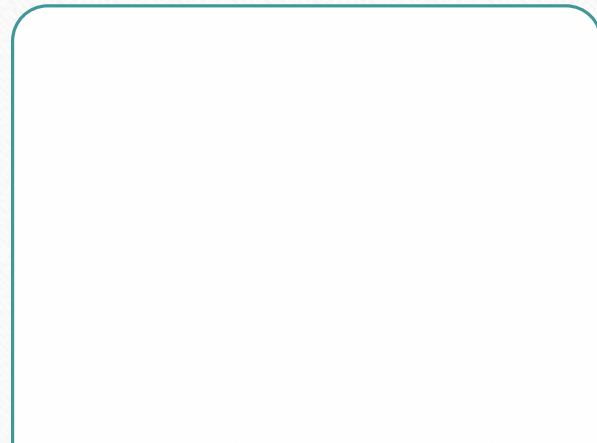
Scholarship

- Tell a story.
- Show they know the student very well.
- Highlights strengths as defined by the scholarships.

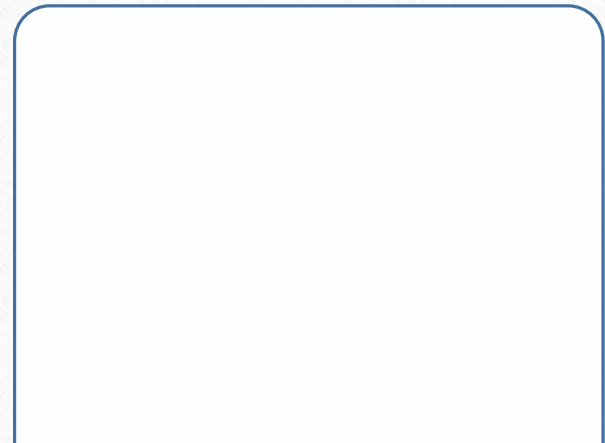
What is an Effective LOR?



Sample



Sample



Sample



TIPS for a Quality Recommendation



**Not Who, But
What**



**Guide the
Letter Writer**



**Understand
the Readers'
Needs**



**Sing Your
Praises**



**Maintain
Relationships**

Not Who, But What



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- Names and titles do not impress
 - Select someone who
 - Can provide details about your personality
 - Can explain the impact or results of your work
 - Can talk about how you have grown over time
 - Can talk about how you will continue to learn
 - Can grow into the position or role you are applying
 - This can include instructors for courses in which you did some of your best work, and it should include any thesis or research supervisors. This also includes internship and volunteer activity supervisors, and employers who can attest to your leadership or ability to learn and work with others in service and professional environments. The specific choices will often depend on which scholarship or graduate school you are applying for.
 - Professors should have taught you in at **Min. ONE** class, pref. an upper division class
 - **NOT:** general academic advisors (unless also professors), teaching assistants, research assistants without a terminal degree

Guide the Letter Writer



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- Remind recommenders about **projects** you worked on together; don't assume they will remember on their own. Provide **dates, details, and descriptions** of the work you completed or interactions you had with the recommender. Ask them to emphasize how you **contributed** to the project.
 - Think about how the school or scholarship describes itself (ex: a quantitative-heavy program or an employer focused on social justice). Read the About Us or History sections of their websites for **keywords**. Share those details with your recommender and ask them to use similar language in your letter (when applicable) to draw connections between you and the organization/school/scholarship.
 - Engage in an in-depth discussion with the letter writer about your career and/or research **aspirations**.
 - Advise them to not include comments on your demeanor (e.g., gentle, kind, sweet, etc.) as this information does not help predict a student's likelihood of success.
 - However, do advise them to share **examples** of your originality, intellectual daring, insight, creativity, perseverance, and integrity by describing specific examples of where these characteristics were observed.
 - Advise them to write about how you **stand out** from other students.
 - Don't forget to remind recommenders (repeatedly) about **deadlines**. They will not be as focused as you are on when things are due.

Understand the Readers' Needs



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- **Scholarships:** They want to understand
 - your desire to fulfill their mission and how you will fulfill their mission
 - what you are like
 - what you value
 - how the scholarship will advance your professional mission
 - **Graduate School:** They want to understand
 - your capacity for academic success
 - how your program fits into your broad professional goals
 - ways you will contribute to the program/learning environment
 - Readers want to see alignment with the other sources they have, such as your resume, personal statements, or LinkedIn profile.
 - Readers want personal insights from those who have interacted with you over a period of time – a perspective beyond what someone will gain in a brief interview.

Sing Your Praises



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- Your recommender should be **raving** about you. They should sing your praises, celebrating what you have done and are capable of doing. At the same time, over-the-top comparisons undercut the validity of the comments they make.
 - Encourage recommenders to ground their praise in **examples with clear details.**

Maintain Relationships



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- Be sure to stay in touch with faculty or supervisors after you complete their class or move on to new positions.
 - Set a calendar reminder to check in regularly and catch up, perhaps once a year.
 - If you see their favorite performer, sports team, or travel destination in the news, email them the story.
 - Share articles related to their work.
 - If you seek to re-establish connections before you ask for the recommendation
 - Refresh their memories with examples of projects you worked on, where you sat in class, a memorable trait of yours, or other clues.
 - Then, ask for a call or another way to update them on your work and life.

Action Steps

- **First**, whenever possible make **appointments** to discuss your scholarship/graduate school application plans in person (or by phone, if necessary) with your prospective recommenders. If you cannot meet or speak, write a *clear, spelled checked, informative e-mail*. Tell them what scholarship/grad. school you are applying for, and why, and ask them candidly if they would be willing to write a letter for you. *Consider how you greet the recommender, e.g. title.*
- **Second**, write a couple of paragraphs for your recommenders describing the nature of the **scholarship/graduate school** you are applying for. This should include information about the nature of the award or school and the broader goals of the program (e.g., supporting the environment, providing international experiences, promoting scientific careers, etc.). *If you are asking for more than LOR, make sure the recommender knows the specifics of each.*

Action Steps

- **Third**, write a brief statement to give to each recommender summarizing a) why you are applying for the particular scholarship/graduate school, b) what you hope to accomplish with the scholarship/during grad. school and c) how winning the scholarship/getting accepted into graduate school would assist you in achieving your educational, service or professional goals. If your application requires a specific project proposal, you should briefly describe your **intended project** as well.
- Remember to tell your recommender you will **WAIVE YOUR RIGHT TO REVIEW THE LETTER.**
- **Fourth**, give each recommender an updated **resume** listing your most recent activities and accomplishments. You might want to call their attention in a separate paragraph to the experiences that you believe make you a well-qualified candidate for the particular scholarship you are applying for. For example, if you are applying for a Fulbright award to teach English in Korea you might highlight your tutoring work for a literacy program in DC, or your coursework on East Asian religion. If you are applying for a science-related award, highlight your research activities or plans, or talk about how you plan to pursue science in the future. **Make sure the recommender can open all attachments!**

Action Steps

- **Fifth**, it is VERY IMPORTANT to give your recommenders ample **time** to prepare their letters. Aim to ask them for letters **AT LEAST four to six weeks** BEFORE recommendations are due.
- **Sixth**, provide them with accurate information about **deadlines** and submission procedures. If there are forms they should fill out, provide them with those forms. Let them know if the recommendations are to be submitted on-line.
- **Seventh**, it can be extremely helpful if one or more of your recommenders also provide **feedback** on your application essays or proposals; ask if they would read a draft and provide constructive criticism and suggestions.
- **Finally**, last but not least, don't neglect **follow-up!** Your recommenders will invest considerable time and thought in preparing your letters, so write them thank you notes and be sure to let them know the outcome of your application. Paper thank you notes or cards are always appreciated, but **NOT** small gifts. Want to avoid appearance of a quid pro quo.

Draft Your Email



- **Start the first paragraph** by stating what you want. *"I am writing to ask if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me."* In the next few sentences, lay out the facts:
 - Your name
 - Year in school
 - Major
 - If it is a professor, which course or courses you took with him/her, when, and what grade you earned
 - Why you need a recommendation (that is, what you are applying for, name of program, school, internship)
 - When the recommendation letter is due
- **For the second paragraph**, outline your relationship with the person.
- **For the third paragraph**, hint at what you'd like the writer to say about you.
 - *"I believe that you're aware through our conversations and my participation in your course that my ultimate goal is to _____. I have interned at _____ and I am part of various student organizations, including _____."*
 - Include any information about yourself that he/she may not be aware of.
 - Explain why his/her recommendation letter will be different from others.
- **Remember to attach documents**
 - Include your CV, the essays you have written for admissions (if it's a grad program), and detailed instructions for how to submit the letter (including all contact information) along with your email.
- **For the last statement**, thank the person, whether or not he/she writes the letter.

Thank you!

- Yee Han Chu PhD MSSW
- Academic Support and Fellowship Opportunities Coordinator
- Upcoming Webinars
 - Goldwater Information Session: 4.11.22
- Interest in Monthly Newsletters
 - Yee.chu@und.edu