St. Vrain Valley Schools
EDUCATION FOUNDATION
Student Success. Teacher Excellence.

Letter of Recommendation Request Guide

Why are letters of recommendation important?

Letters of recommendation help college entrance boards and scholarship review boards learn more about your strengths, character, accomplishments, and potential. Letters are usually requested from those that can speak to your intellectual abilities, work ethic, leadership skills, and how you interact with others.

Types of Recommendation Letters

- **Academic Recommendation:** Should come from someone who can speak to your performance as a student. They can describe your academic strengths, classroom engagement, work ethic, leadership, and growth. Letters should be on school letterhead and signed by the recommender. This includes:
  - **Teacher**
  - **Coach**
  - **Counselor**
  - **Principal or Assistant Principal**
- **Personal Recommendation:** Should come from someone who knows you well outside of your family. They can describe your character, responsibility, communication skills, and contributions to the community. Letters need to be signed and on letterhead if it is from a business or organization. This can include:
  - **Employer or Supervisor**
  - **Mentor**
  - **Volunteer Coordinator**
  - **Community Leader or Youth Group Leader**

How to Request a Strong Letter

1. **Ask Early:** Give your recommender **at least 3-4 weeks** before the deadline. Great letters of recommendation take time!
2. **Ask Politely and In Person** (when possible)**:** Example of what to say - "Would you feel comfortable writing a letter of recommendation for me for a scholarship application? I would really appreciate your support."
3. **Provide Helpful Information:** Make it easy for them to write a strong, detailed letter. Share with the recommender:
   a. Your **full name**
   b. The **deadline**
   c. The **scholarship, college, or program** you are applying for
   d. A short summary of your **goals, interests** or **plans for the future**
   e. **Activities, achievements, or experiences** you would like for them to highlight.
4. **Follow Up:** Politely check in with a reminder **one week before the deadline** if needed.
5. **Say Thank You:** Always thank your recommender. A thank you note goes a long way!

Special Recommendation Requirements

Some scholarships or applications require a letter from a **specific type of recommender**. Always review each application carefully so you know **exactly who** must write your letter. If the application requires a specific recommender, reach out to that person first. Do not substitute unless the scholarship instructions allow it. Examples may include:

- A **teacher in a specific subject area** such as math teacher for a math focused scholarship or band/choir teacher for a music focused scholarship.
- A **school administrator or counselor** for a scholarship focused on leadership or school involvement.
- A **coach or academic sponsor** for athletic or extracurricular scholarships.
- A **supervisor or employer** for career-readiness or workforce based awards.
- A **volunteer coordinator** for community service scholarships.

What to Avoid

To ensure your letter is strong and helpful:

- **Do not ask a family member** to write the letter of recommendation. Family letters are typically not accepted and are viewed as biased.
- **Do not ask at the last minute**. Rushed letters are rarely strong and the recommender may decline the request to write the letter for you.
- **Do not assume someone will write a letter - always ask first.** The recommender may not feel able to provide a positive or detailed recommendation.
- **Do not choose someone who barely knows you.** Pick someone who can speak about your strengths, character or involvement with specific examples.
- **Do not forget to follow instructions.** If the application requires a specific type of recommender, do not choose someone else.
- **Do not ask for edits to the letter unless the recommender offers.** Their letter should reflect their genuine perspective.
- **Do not allow letters to be submitted without confidence in what is being said about you.** Select recommenders who know you well and who you trust to provide a positive and accurate endorsement.

Final Tips

- **Choose recommenders strategically.** Select people who know you well and can speak positively about your strengths or share specific stories.
- **Make sure your recommender provides the letter in an upload-friendly format.** Most electronic applications work best with a PDF file.
- **Keep track of deadlines.** A simple checklist or calendar can prevent missed opportunities.
- **Build relationships early.** Participate in class, volunteer, and communicate with mentors throughout the year so you have strong options when recommendation time arrives.
- **Update your recommenders.** Let them know when you receive scholarships or acceptance letters, they love to celebrate your success!
- **Stay organized.** Keep copies of your résumé, list of activities, and scholarship details ready to share.