

Your Admissions Mentor Recommendation Letter Guide and Worksheet

How to prepare for a meaningful recommendation meeting

The Purpose of This Guide

A strong recommendation letter includes specific evidence of how you learn, grow, contribute, and respond to challenges. This guide will help you give your recommender the experiences and context needed to write a detailed, personal letter.

The central rule is simple: begin with what you actually did, turn your strongest experiences into mini-stories, and then identify the qualities those stories demonstrate.

The Order to Follow

Step	What to Do
1	Confirm the request, deadline, and application logistics.
2	List everything you have done with this recommender.
3	Choose the experiences that show growth, character, and contribution.
4	Turn those experiences into specific mini-stories.
5	Identify the qualities each story proves.
6	Explain your interests, goals, and future direction.
7	Meet with your recommender and answer their questions naturally.
8	Send a thank-you message and track the submission.

Step 1 Complete the Logistics

Take care of the basic details before the meeting so your conversation can focus on your experiences and goals.

- ☐ Ask whether the person feels comfortable writing you a strong recommendation.
- ☐ Send your updated résumé.
- ☐ Add the recommender to the correct application portal.
- ☐ Confirm that the recommendation request email arrived.
- ☐ Share your college, scholarship, or program list.
- ☐ State the earliest submission deadline clearly.
- ☐ Bring or send the completed worksheets from this guide.

Recommender name and role:

Applications or programs that need this letter:

Earliest deadline:

Materials I sent:

Questions I still need to ask:

How to Open the Meeting

“Thank you so much for agreeing to write a recommendation for me. I really appreciate your time and support. I sent my résumé and added your information to the application portal. Were you able to receive everything?”

Step 2 List Everything You Have Done

Do not begin by choosing traits such as hardworking, kind, or responsible. First, create a complete inventory of your experiences with this recommender. Your specific experiences will reveal the strongest qualities naturally.

For an Academic Recommender

- Units, lessons, readings, projects, labs, papers, or assignments you remember
- Topics that challenged you or changed your thinking
- Tests, papers, or skills on which you improved
- Times you asked for help or attended extra-help sessions
- Questions you asked or ideas you shared in class
- Group projects, partner work, presentations, or discussions
- Times you helped another student or strengthened a group
- Feedback you received and applied
- Mistakes that changed your approach
- Study habits, confidence, or work routines you developed
- Topics or teaching methods you genuinely enjoyed

For an Activity Leader Coach Employer or Mentor

- Projects, events, performances, competitions, shifts, or responsibilities
- Formal and informal leadership roles
- Times you trained, supported, or mentored someone
- Moments when you worked through pressure, setbacks, or conflict
- Times you took initiative without being asked
- Feedback you received and how you responded
- Ways you improved the team, group, workplace, or community
- A moment that strengthened your commitment to this interest

Experience Inventory Worksheet

Write down everything that comes to mind. You will evaluate and organize the experiences later.

Experience 1:

Experience 2:

Experience 3:

Experience 4:

Experience 5:

Experience 6:

Experience 7:

Experience 8:

Step 3 Choose the Most Useful Experiences

Review your inventory and select approximately three to five experiences that would help your recommender understand you. A useful experience usually shows action, growth, contribution, or a meaningful change in perspective.

Look for Experiences That Show

- How you responded when something was difficult
- How you improved rather than only the final grade or result
- How you worked with, helped, or learned from other people
- How you took responsibility or initiative
- How you applied feedback
- How your confidence, curiosity, or independence developed
- How you contributed to a class, team, workplace, or community
- Why an academic subject, activity, or goal matters to you

Evidence Before Adjectives

A generic statement gives a recommender very little to use: “This student is hardworking.” A specific moment provides evidence: “After struggling with the first assessment, the student began reviewing every missed problem, attended extra help, and changed how they prepared for later assignments.”

The second version allows the recommender to describe work ethic, initiative, self-awareness, and growth without relying on empty adjectives.

The three to five experiences I want to develop:

Step 4 Turn Experiences Into Mini Stories

Your stories do not need to be dramatic. They need to be specific enough that your recommender can picture what happened and understand your actions.

1. Situation: What was happening?
2. Challenge or responsibility: What was difficult, important, or expected of you?
3. Action: What did you personally do?
4. Result: What changed, improved, or happened because of your actions?
5. Reflection: What did you learn, and how did you grow?
6. Quality: What trait does this experience demonstrate?
7. Future connection: How will this lesson affect what you do next?

Mini Story Formula

During [specific experience], I faced [challenge or responsibility]. I responded by [specific actions]. As a result, [outcome]. This taught me [lesson] and demonstrates my [quality]. It will help me [future connection].

Sample

During a group project, one member was struggling to understand the assignment. I organized a short planning session, asked each person what support they needed, and divided the work according to our strengths. We completed the project on time, and I learned that leadership can mean listening and creating structure rather than simply taking control.

Mini Story Worksheet

Story 1

Experience and setting:

Challenge or responsibility:

What I specifically did:

Result or impact:

What I learned:

Qualities demonstrated:

Connection to my future goals:

Story 2

Experience and setting:

Challenge or responsibility:

What I specifically did:

Result or impact:

What I learned:

Qualities demonstrated:

Connection to my future goals:

Mini Story Worksheet Continued

Story 3

Experience and setting:

Challenge or responsibility:

What I specifically did:

Result or impact:

What I learned:

Qualities demonstrated:

Connection to my future goals:

Story 4

Experience and setting:

Challenge or responsibility:

What I specifically did:

Result or impact:

What I learned:

Qualities demonstrated:

Connection to my future goals:

Step 5 Match Stories to Qualities

After developing your stories, identify the qualities each one actually proves. A single story may demonstrate several qualities, but choose the two or three most clearly supported by your actions.

Experience	Evidence From the Student's Actions	Qualities It Could Show
Changed an ineffective study method	Reviewed mistakes, sought help, and practiced differently	Initiative, maturity, perseverance
Helped a peer during a group assignment	Explained the task and invited the peer's ideas	Collaboration, patience, communication
Became more active in discussion	Asked questions and shared possible interpretations	Curiosity, confidence, intellectual courage
Took responsibility during an event	Noticed a problem, created a plan, and followed through	Leadership, reliability, problem-solving
Responded constructively to feedback	Made revisions and used the advice in later work	Coachability, self-awareness, growth

My Evidence Map

My Experience	What I Did	Result	Qualities

Step 6 Help Each Letter Add Something New

If you have multiple recommenders, avoid giving all of them the same stories and traits. Think about the distinct side of you that each person has observed. Together, the letters should create a fuller picture of who you are.

Questions to Consider

- What has this recommender personally seen that another recommender has not?
- Which qualities can this person support with the strongest evidence?
- Does this letter show my academic thinking, leadership, collaboration, resilience, creativity, service, or another dimension?
- Are my recommenders likely to repeat the same examples?
- What important part of me is not yet represented anywhere in my application?

Recommender	Side of Me They Know	Stories to Share	Qualities
1			
2			
3			

What You Enjoyed and Learned

Briefly tell the recommender what you valued about their class, team, workplace, or mentorship. Be specific. Mention a lesson, assignment, routine, conversation, or approach that genuinely affected you. This gives the meeting warmth and context, but your main focus should remain on concrete experiences and growth.

What I genuinely valued about this experience:

Step 7 Explain Your Goals

Your recommender needs enough context to understand where you are headed. Explain your current interests honestly, even if your plans are still developing. Then connect your experience with this recommender to the skills or perspective you will carry forward.

Information You Can Share

- The colleges, scholarships, or programs to which you are applying
- Your current academic interests or possible majors
- Activities, communities, or problems you hope to explore
- Possible career or service goals
- What you hope to learn or contribute in college
- How this class, activity, job, or mentorship prepared you

My current academic interests or possible majors:

My colleges programs or scholarships:

My future goals:

How this experience prepared me for those goals:

Step 8 Follow This Order During the Meeting

Use these points as a conversation guide rather than a speech you must memorize.

1 Express Gratitude

“Thank you so much for agreeing to write a recommendation for me. I really appreciate your time and support.”

2 Confirm the Materials

“I sent my résumé and added your information to the application portal. Were you able to receive everything?”

3 Discuss Your Experience With Them

Mention something specific you enjoyed, learned, or appreciated about the class, activity, team, job, or mentorship.

4 Share Two or Three Mini Stories

Briefly explain what happened, what you did, the result, and what you learned. Give the recommender room to ask follow-up questions.

5 Explain Your Future Goals

Share your current academic, college, career, or service interests and explain how this experience connects to them.

6 Let the Conversation Develop Naturally

Listen carefully and answer honestly. Your recommender may ask questions you did not prepare for, and those questions may lead to useful details or stories.

Meeting Notes and Follow Up

Questions my recommender asked:

Stories or qualities they seemed interested in:

Additional materials or information they requested:

What I need to send and by when:

After the Meeting

- ☐ Send any requested information promptly.
- ☐ Send a brief thank-you message.
- ☐ Record the submission deadline.
- ☐ Check the portal for submission without repeatedly pressuring the recommender.
- ☐ Thank the recommender again after the letter is submitted.

Final Reminder

Begin with what you did. Turn your strongest experiences into mini-stories. Identify the qualities those stories prove. Then connect your growth to your future. Specific evidence gives your recommender the material needed to write a memorable letter.