

Tips for Writing a Good Recommendation From WSP Director Christoph Irmscher

To our recommenders:

We appreciate the time you're taking to offer us additional information on the student who has been nominated! Letters of recommendation are one of the most important elements of a nomination file. Here are a few suggestions, based on years of reviewing hundreds of files each fall.

First, and perhaps most important, try to avoid summarizing a student's resume or report card or the essay the student has just submitted. Please give us a sense of them as a person, by telling a story, recalling a conversation you had, or describing an outstanding thing the student did for you, the community, or maybe even the world.

Secondly, stereotypical phrases such as "well-rounded," "an asset," "an investment worth making" do not help our faculty reviewers get a sense of the nominee as a person, and they are likely to make your letter sound like the many others we get. Hyperbole can be dangerous, unless it is backed up by facts or comes across as heartfelt (e.g. "of all the students I have taught in my thirty years of high school biology, she is the one I will remember most fondly, because.....").

Third, although we know this is really hard given the many demands on your time, try to make your letter a substantial one. Letters that are on the short side might suggest to our faculty committee that the student's accomplishments didn't warrant the effort implied by a longer, more substantive letter of recommendation.

Finally, once again, please be assured that we deeply value the work you're doing on behalf of our future Scholars!

Please contact our office with any questions or concerns:
wellssch@indiana.edu or 812-855-9491