

## Writing a letter of recommendation for an applicant to the Linguistics Program at The Graduate Center, CUNY

We are interested in learning about the applicant's potential to carry out research projects, their academic and research achievements, the likelihood that they can successfully complete an M.A. or Ph.D. program, their commitment, and their ability to work in a sustained fashion. You may find it useful to have the applicant supply you with the following pieces of information about themselves:

- Classes they have taken with you
- Transcripts
- Resume or CV, including awards or special achievements
- Research experience and internships
- Academic goals
- If they have carried out research with you, a summary of their activities and what they learned in the course of the research

It will be helpful to us if you include the following relevant information about yourself and your experiences with the applicant:

- Your title and how you know the applicant
- How long you have known the applicant
- Your personal and professional relationship with the applicant
- How the applicant impressed you – what qualities of mind, work habits, and participation distinguish the applicant compared to other people for whom you've written letters
- How you know what you know about the applicant – specific details are helpful
- How the applicant is qualified for graduate school

The Graduate Center, CUNY asks recommenders to rate the applicant on one dimension.

Recommenders choose:

- recommend without reservation
- recommend with reservation
- do not recommend.

Other graduate schools may request more detailed ratings. It may be useful to have an idea of the kinds of characteristics graduate schools may ask you to rate because they may suggest qualities for you to describe for a CUNY application. Here are some examples: verbal ability, writing ability, research skills, critical thinking, analytical ability, motivation to succeed, dependability, originality, ability to work independently, ability to work collaboratively, work habits, likelihood that the applicant will successfully complete graduate school. You may also want to indicate where the student stands compared to other students you have observed.

There are data suggesting that letter writers might unintentionally write more positive letters of recommendation, especially when describing their potential for research, for men than for women. (See Stewart & Valian, 2018, for a summary.) Similarly, there are data suggesting that recommenders in the US write more favorably for white students than students of color (Houser & Lemmons, 2018).

**Sources:** We used material from several websites as background in writing our suggestions.

<https://wordvice.com/graduate-school-recommendation-letter-templates-and-examples/>

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-write-a-grad-school-recommendation-letter>

<https://writingcenter.prompt.com/recommendation-letter-graduate-school>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/effective-grad-school-recommendation-letters-1685931>

<https://mygraduateschool.wordpress.com/2010/12/02/applicant-evaluation-forms-even-more-important-than-the-reference-letters/>

Houser, C., & Lemmons, K. (2018). Implicit bias in letters of recommendation for an undergraduate research internship. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(5), 585-595.

Stewart, A. & Valian, V. (2018). *An inclusive academy: Achieving diversity and excellence*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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