

REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FOR PRIVATE COLLEGES* OR SCHOLARSHIPS

Many private colleges and scholarship organizations require recommendations from teachers, a School Report from a guidance advisor or administrator, or both. Good, well-written recommendations describing your strengths—and weaknesses—are extremely helpful in supporting your application.

Colleges are looking for personal insights about student applicants, not a reiteration of grades and test scores. The most effective letters are usually obtained from teachers who know the student very well and who can use specific examples or anecdotes in their letters.

Keep in mind that the School Report (written by your guidance advisor or an administrator) does not serve the same function as a teacher recommendation. Whereas a teacher should know you well both academically and personally, a counselor's recommendation will explain your transcript and your high school "career" in the context of your school; in other words, a counselor might write, "This student took the most rigorous courses available at Menlo-Atherton," or "The student did not continue in AP foreign language because the class would have conflicted with her AP science class." Colleges understand that students often do not have a close personal relationship with their guidance advisors. The contents of this packet and a brief meeting with your guidance advisor will help him/her to know you better; however, the context of your accomplishments can be explained in the School Report without close, personal knowledge.

The most competitive colleges usually require letters from teachers of college-prep courses (i.e., English, social science, lab science, math, and foreign language). Faculty members in these areas have witnessed your strengths in their classrooms and understand what you are capable of contributing in a college setting. In selecting people to write your recommendations, consider that you may want these letters to illustrate a balance of your interests. For instance, recommendations from an English or history teacher, a math or science teacher, and a coach, would give a broader picture than recommendations from three math teachers. Sometimes the best person to write a recommendation for you is a teacher in whose class you were academically challenged; it is not necessarily the class in which you received the highest grade.

Menlo-Atherton teachers accept the task of writing recommendations as part of their professional responsibilities (*it is not required of them!*). You should remember that teachers who agree to write for you do so not only from professional responsibility but from a close knowledge of you and an appreciation of your academic and personal strengths. Some teachers prefer not to write if they have not had a student in class a full semester or a year. If a teacher prefers not to write for you and tells you so, give thanks and ask someone else. That teacher has spared you a weak recommendation that could jeopardize your chances in the college admission process.

Teachers, guidance advisors, or administrators who write recommendations will evaluate you not only academically but also in your concern for the school and others, the respect the faculty has for you, your citizenship and integrity, and your self-discipline. Obviously, you should take all steps to justify their high regard for you in the way you go about obtaining your recommendations. *Colleges may ask for information regarding your character and integrity as they relate to academics and citizenship here at M-A. Teachers and guidance advisors need to address those issues where appropriate. Following all school rules and academic guidelines will help you receive the support you need for college and job search efforts.*

- *The University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) do not require recommendations.*

IF YOU WANT THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS, DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Send early for college applications, which include the appropriate recommendation forms.
- Arrange well in advance with teachers, guidance advisors, or administrators to write recs for you. Please do not ask for more recs than you actually need! Some teachers would like to write their recs over the summer; be sure to ask when they need all of your information. When you ask that they write for you, be courteous. If certain teachers prefer not to write, thank them—their honesty has been a favor to you—and ask someone else.
- Give every person who agrees to write a letter for you the following items:
 - a. A completed copy of this packet, with all required supporting materials listed on the back page.
 - b. A stamped envelope addressed to the college's office of admission.
 - c. A copy of your transcript if you are requesting a School Report to be completed by an AVP or an administrator instead of a guidance advisor.
 - d. A copy of the college's recommendation form (or the Common Application form, if you are using the Common Application).
- If you are applying to more than one private college, ask the SAME people to send letters for all of your applications. Most private colleges require either one or two academic letters of recommendation (and many allow a supplementary recommendation from a coach, community service supervisor, employer, etc.—someone who knows you from a different perspective; these supplementary letters should *not* come from another academic teacher). A good letter can take several hours to compose and type; it makes more sense to have one teacher change headings and addresses than to have several teachers write different letters.
- Be sure to fill out the student part of the recommendation form. If you don't, your rec may never get sent. If a teacher has five recommendation forms and one doesn't have a name on it, he/she will be able to send out only four letters.
- You can also fill out the "teacher" part of the form with the name and address of the high school, the phone number, etc., in order to save your recommenders a little time.
- Sign the statement (if there is one) that you agree to waive your rights to see a copy of the recommendation. Most teachers are not comfortable writing a recommendation—no matter how glowing it may be—for a student who has not waived the right to see his/her file.
- About one week before the recommendation is due, you might drop by to see the person who is writing for you to ask if you could provide further information before the deadline. This kind of courteous inquiry serves as a gentle reminder of the deadline.
- Some teachers ask that students for whom they are writing recommendations perform some service in exchange for their time. This might involve grading papers, tidying the classroom, or anything else that would help make up some of the teacher's time. You might offer such services even if you are not asked; it would be a courtesy.
- Be sure to write a note of thanks to each person who has written a recommendation for you!!! And tell your recommenders where you were accepted, where you will go to college, and how much you appreciated their help. Some colleges weigh recommendation letters quite heavily in their admission process; those great letters might have had a lot to do with your admission to the college of your choice!

Today's Date _____ Recommendation Deadline Date _____

Full Legal Name _____ Home Phone # _____

Street Address _____ E-mail Address _____

Parents' Names _____ Brothers/Sisters _____

Father's Occupation _____ Work Phone _____

Mother's Occupation _____ Work Phone _____

TEST SCORES PSAT Verbal _____ Math _____

SAT Verbal _____ Math _____ ACT _____

What colleges are you considering? _____

What college majors are you considering? _____

What careers are you considering? _____

WORK EXPERIENCE: Note any work experience you had during high school.

	TYPE OF POSITION	NAME OF EMPLOYER	LENGTH OF TIME
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____

REFERENCES: List three faculty members who could be contacted as references:

AWARDS: List any awards or honors you received during high school:

	NAME OF AWARD	ORGANIZATION	DATE OF AWARD
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____

Describe your involvement in one activity or job:

Describe yourself as you think your best friend would describe you:

Briefly indicate your principal strengths:

Briefly indicate your principal weaknesses:

Detail any evidence of your intellectual promise, motivation, integrity, intellectual maturity, communication skills, creativity, leadership, or anything else . . . If you did a special project or activity that distinguishes your performance in the class of the teacher who will be writing your rec, describe it clearly (art portfolio, term paper, creative writing project, math contest, etc.).

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: Indicate participation each year; if you have held offices or earned special honors, please indicate this.

FRESHMAN YEAR

SOPHOMORE YEAR

JUNIOR YEAR

SENIOR YEAR

SUPPORTING MATERIALS REQUIRED

COLLEGE ESSAY: If your college required you to write a personal statement or essay, please attach a copy of your essay to this form.

PARENT STATEMENT: Have your parents write a short (one-page maximum) statement about what they consider to be your strengths, weaknesses, or uniqueness, and attach a copy to this form.

PEER STATEMENT: Have your best friend write a short (one-page maximum) statement about what he/she considers to be your strengths, weaknesses, or uniqueness, and attach a copy to this form.

OTHER: For your classroom teachers, you might provide copies of graded work or papers completed in their classes; this will help remind them of the quality of your work.

TRANSCRIPT: Please attach a copy of your transcript to this form.