

Activity #2: Helpful vs. Unhelpful **(both from an English Teacher)**

Teacher Recommendation #1:

It is my great pleasure to recommend HN. HN took my course, British Literature for her junior year, and she received an A. Currently, she is taking my social Justice course and she received an A for her first marking period grade.

Her outstanding academic achievements proves her great potential of success in her future study in the higher education. She received the first and second honors in her high school. She received the County Math League Certificate of Merit 2016-17, which proves that she has a tremendous talent in Math. Furthermore, she is fluent both in English and Korean.

Her volunteer experiences and activities will contribute to her further study at the college level. She was a volunteer as a Korean tutor for Korean Americans at her church. She was a volunteer of America Wheat Mission Inc. and Mission for people with disabilities. She went to Haiti for Mission trip during summer 2017. She was a volunteer for a soup kitchen in 2017. She was a member of S.I.G.N. (Service in God's Name), National Honor Society, peer ministry, math club, Student Council, and Korean-American Club.

I highly recommend HN to you for admission. If you have any questions, please contact me anytime.

Teacher Recommendation #2:

As I got to know PN in the classroom in my junior English course, he again proved to be an engaging, confident, compassionate young man. In literature, PN often roots for the underdog; he has no patience for hypocrisy or elitism. He is a decent, hardworking young man. An engaging discussant and a dynamic public speaker, Paul could be at home as an elected public servant. He care about others and does not feel the need to protect himself behind false macho bravado. Just last week in our senior English seminar, PN was at a discussion table with three other male seniors. A pretty aggressive bunch, the ground attempted to give PN a difficult time for a stand he took on a political view as it related to a short story we were studying. They first tried to get him to distance himself from the unpopular opinion, then moved to give him an out by saying he couldn't fully understand the issue, and ultimately tried to bully him into backing down. PN's response, "I believe what I believe. I did not misspeak. I understand the issue and I believe my stance helps more people than just myself." It was consummate PN, mature, self-assured, and connected to his convictions.

PN is a wonderful student to have in the classroom. He is engaged, open, and yearning to learn. He is respectful and optimistic, a pleasure to know. I am certain he will make a positive impact on his college campus.

Activity #3: Guess the GPA Range

These are snippets of three counselor recommendations. Your job is to read the remarks and guess the GPA range of each student. One student is above 4.0, one in the middle 3.0 range, and another below a 3.0. After you've read the three comments, make a decision on your own, and then turn to a group near you and discuss what you all think.

Student #1:

GM is well-liked by everyone in the [school name] community. She is friendly, funny, and quirky. But just a few years ago, GM was painfully shy--answering a question in class terrified her. She didn't want to draw attention to herself for fear of being different or weird. True to her love of learning, she studied the "confident" students in her class at school to see what their differences were. GM then took small steps to "appear" more confident, starting with smiling more and saying hi to others. She stood up straighter and pulled her hair out of her face. Just like in the song "I Whistle a Happy Tune" from "The King and I," GM realized that when she tried to appear more confident, she actually felt more confident. We are so grateful that GM finally feels comfortable in her own skin because we all have gotten to know just how unique and special she is.

Student #2:

When IR fills out college applications, there often are not enough spaces available for her to enter all of her siblings. Ranging in age from 4 to 20, IR is the third of nine kids in her large, multiple household family. Her parents give her a lot of responsibility and often rely on her to help take care of her younger siblings. As a result, IR is one of the most patient and helpful seniors in our class of 2019 at [school]. It is no surprise to us that IR has chosen a helping profession as her career of choice: nursing.

IR is also a genuinely kind and honest person. "I say what I mean and don't pretend to be someone I'm not," IR told us. She's not afraid of sticking to her morals and values, even if that means making an unpopular choice. While researching colleges, it was important to find a community where others would hold similar values to her. Attending a Catholic high school has opened her eyes to issues of social justice, and she has also been drawn to colleges where students take their knowledge and skills into the community to make a positive impact. IR sees the bigger picture and wants to make an impact in it.

Student #3

A voracious reader, AA says that books have been her best friends since childhood. Her love of reading has translated into creative writing and research. She constantly loses herself in subjects ranging from ancestry, cold cases, historical places, and rocks, minerals, and plants native to Los Angeles. In fact, AA is a docent at the Stough Nature Center in the Verdugo Mountains. Art and design are areas that appeal to her, but in considering a college major, anthropology, archaeology, forensic science, and history are also at the top of her list. With her wide range of interests and enormous appetite for learning, a liberal arts education is the perfect match for her. She has too many interests to focus on just one, and she is quick to make connections between seemingly unrelated topics because of all the facts

she has accumulated through her research. We would not be surprised if AA continues her education far beyond her undergraduate degree; AA's desire to learn cannot be sated.

Counselor Examples to Address Areas of Growth or Challenges

Example #1:

She hasn't shied away from challenging classes; she took her first AP (US History) last year. She confided in one of her advisors that she was afraid she wouldn't be able to balance her junior year schedule. As her advisor told us, "AV's effervescent personality, steady work ethic, and dedication allowed her to prioritize time. By the middle of the year, AV expressed that she was not as stressed as she thought because she had learned how to balance and manage her time." AV added AP English Literature and AP Art History to her schedule for her senior year, along with both Physics and Calculus, because she now knows she can handle it with her organizational skills.

Example #2:

We cannot imagine starting your freshman year of high school knowing your mom is battling stage 4 lung cancer, let alone starting high school the month your mom passes away. That's exactly what happened to LP. She and her dad credit the community at [school name] for helping her get through this tragic point in her life. With all the support she received from her family and friends, LP has grown in strength and empathy, and she has taken on more responsibility in her life than the average teen. She has also shown tremendous growth academically during her high school years, and we are excited to see where college will take her.

Example #3:

Luckily, AA's senior year is starting out to be her best year academically and emotionally. She has battled depression, and it greatly affected her academic achievement. Her support team both in and outside of [school name] has helped AA prepare for her senior year and beyond. AA's first quarter grades are her best ever: all As and Bs. Teachers who taught her earlier in her high school years and again now have noticed a turnaround. We have full confidence we are just seeing the beginning of an academic one-eighty as her good grades have further motivated AA to achieve more.

Example #4

Spanish has continually been the subject in which HR has struggled, and math is his favorite core subject. He describes his love of math in this manner: "[math] problems are like a puzzle that I have to solve." That is such a HR statement as he enjoys untangling problems and views his art and creation process in a similar manner. In the classroom, HR thanks his sophomore history teacher for having a strict style which truly challenged him to learn better study habits. This shows on his transcript as he has gone from a 3.0 unweighted GPA in 9th and 10th grades to a 3.56 unweighted GPA in junior year. These improved habits are evidenced in his 11th grade English teacher comments last year.

Example #5

RS has attended [school name] since kindergarten and is ready for a different experience. Until high school, she was the only African-American female in her class and one of three African-Americans in her grade. Unfortunately, there wasn't a single Black teacher in the lower school and only two Black male teachers in the middle school, so she never really saw teachers or students who looked like her. To say she is used to being on her own in the classroom is an understatement, so she was excited for the first days of high school because there are now six Black teacher/administrators like myself. We have the perspective to say this environment isn't the norm and you will see more Black kids in high school and college. She has been a regular at Black Student Union meetings and was one of the founding members of Women of Color (WOC) club, where she is now the co-president. The WOC started because there was a sexist dispute in the BSU where the women noticed the male co-presidents weren't listening to the ideas of the women. To their credit, they didn't leave the BSU. They did start a conversation in BSU meetings, and three of the young women took it upon themselves to start a club where they could talk about the intersections of race and gender. What I appreciate most about RS is that she loves to take the action steps.

Teacher Examples to Address Areas of Growth or Challenges

"From the start of the year, ST shared that she did not want to repeat the struggles she had experienced in previous English classes. In her own words, as a new-to-lab student, "being with such great students and really smart thinking tanked my confidence as an English student [...] I realized during the summer before your class something very important: I tend to do my worst when my confidence was down." SHE was a student who when things were going well, they were really going well, and when they weren't, everything seemed to fall apart. Despite this, she cared about ideas and she was diligent in responding in discussions, reading texts with interest, and putting her whole self into writing assignments."

"TR started the fall semester off a little rough. He was out of town for a job he was working on and missed a few classes. On top of that he was responsible for getting his little other ready in the morning which meant he was late to school quite often. I expressed my concern regarding his absences and he agreed with me that he wasn't giving it his all. From that moment forward a new TR emerged. He asked to sit in the front row and became a model of consistency in the classroom. He gave every class, ever assignment, and every discussions 100 percent. I've never seen a student so eager to grow"

"Throughout our time together in class, RL was the singularly most reliable, most consistent member of our class. She knew the material would be tough and embraced it; she wasn't afraid to ask for clarification or help when needed, and regularly added unique and personal observations to our group discussions. Her approach to education has been collaborative, supportive, and growth-oriented; she takes her responsibility as a class colleague seriously, and knows it's equally important to prepare to participate in a seminar as it is to lead her own."

"RN always demonstrated her commitment to doing well despite her struggles with Math concepts. She was a great participant in this class, offering responses to questions and also asking questions to help ensure she understood the material at hand. Her interactions with classmates in discussions and group work were extremely productive. She was also not shy in communication and talking to me one-on-one about her Math issues. In addition, she was always receptive to suggestions on how she could improve her performance in the class. She was frequently the last person to leave class, as she took great care to

organize her materials or to finish a problem she was still working on.

Sample Questions for Counselors to Gather Information:

1. Preferred pronouns:
2. What makes you happy? Think beyond family and friends. Think about experiences, places, ideas, etc. Write a paragraph each for two or three things that make you happy. For each thing, discuss the specific reasons why it makes you happy and the values it represents in your life.
3. What is something that not a lot of people know or realize about you, but nonetheless defines you in some meaningful way?
4. What are your favorite qualities about yourself? For example, are you bold, a good listener, etc.? Please provide a couple of anecdotes that illustrate these traits. Think broadly. Would your friends and family agree with this assessment?
 - a. [Or] Identify and discuss your three most defining qualities or characteristics. Think about the qualities that most contribute to your academic achievement, your relationships with friends and family, or your approach to life. Write a few sentences on each.
5. Comment on a significant learning experience or turning point in your high school career. Describe the setting and experience and why it was meaningful to you.
 - a. [or for a more detailed version] What has been your most significant intellectual/academic activity during high school? This could be something you did at [school name] or outside the school. Describe the general topic and the work associated. What aspects of it most engaged you? What did you learn? Why did you love it?
6. What are your thoughts/opinions about your academic record during high school?
 - a. [or for a more detailed versions] What circumstances, if any, have interfered with your academic performance? Also, are there any grades on your transcript that you would like to explain?
 - b. Describe your academic journey in high school. How did you enter as a freshman? Describe the academic successes and challenges you have experienced since then. Include any details on learning differences and personal experiences that might have affected your academic achievement, and talk about what you learned from those experiences. Feel free to include your thoughts on any trends in grades or particularly strong interest in specific subjects. Finally, talk about where you stand now as a student and what you hope to achieve in college.
7. Describe your experience at [school]. Include any areas that you particularly enjoy or do not enjoy
 - a. [or for a more detailed version] Think about one of the communities to which you belong here at [school name], one that is important to you. This could be a team, an academic club, a performing arts group, or something else. Describe your history with the group. Why did you join? How has the group challenged you? How has your role within that group grown/changed/evolved over time? From your experiences in this community, what have you learned about yourself as a member of and contributor to a team? What strengths and talents do you bring to a collective effort?
8. Why do you do what you do? Please provide a detailed explanation of your activities and explain why they are important to you.

9. Are there any special traditions in your life? For example, family traditions, fun things you do with your friends on a regular basis, etc. What makes these traditions special?
10. Describe your role in the classroom. How would your classmates describe you? Your teachers?
11. Given the research you've done, how would you describe your current thinking about career objectives and possible college majors? How did you become interested in these subjects?
12. Given the time, some people like to go for a run. Others like to read or paint or meditate. Some people collect things. Describe your personal pastime, the thing you do that is all your own. Provide details about how you got started and how this has changed over time. Also give some sense of the joy or satisfaction you get from it, and the things you have learned about yourself and your approach to life, the things you value and find important. If you have more than one pastime you would like to discuss, feel free to do so.

Sample Questions for Teachers to Gather Information:

1. What is your appraisal of your academic performance in this course? Be sure to mention your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Of the assignments/assessments/activities/texts from the class, which have been the most meaningful to you? Why?
3. Where did you experience the most challenge in this class?
4. Where did you experience the most success in this class? What specific accomplishment are you most proud of?
5. How did this class allow you to grow as a learner?
6. If you were to go back to the first day of class to advise yourself on how to be successful in this class, what would you say? What experiences inform this advice?
7. In what ways did your experiences in this class help to inspire/inform your ideas about what you might like to do in the future?
8. Are there specific reasons why you asked me to write you your letter of recommendation?
9. Are there other things I should know about your involvement in this class that could inform the letter of recommendation?
10. *Optional:* Do you know what you will study in college? Why will you choose that path?

Teacher Recommendation Tips

Context:

We're usually reading recommendations after having looked at the transcript (where we spend most of our time), the test scores, and the application itself. At this point, we'll know about their involvement, their personal story, their disciplinary record, etc. We're looking to the teacher recommendation *specifically* to give insight in to who the student is in the classroom.

Teacher Recs Can:

Give the classroom picture—we don't get that elsewhere (Just because someone is a good student doesn't mean he is a good class member)
Explain a dip in performance, where appropriate, and how the student handled it
Explain the type of classroom where a student would thrive (discussion-based, large format, etc)

How to Prepare:

Make sure students share deadline for each school—they're likely different
Know the school—ie don't write something about the student thriving in rural environments for NYU recommendation
Pump student's brain for things you can use later as examples (have them remind you of a paper they were quite proud of that they wrote for class, the way they handled a tough setback, etc)
Get in habit of keeping copies of exemplary work—can quote it **briefly**

DON'T:

Generic	Inevitably forget to change name or gender pronouns—gives it away. We see through lack of sincerity
Class structure	Only describe if really unique & relevant to assessment of student
Self vs. Student	Some teachers feel compelled to give three-paragraph CV/bio—avoid talking about self. We trust that teachers are qualified to give us what we want which is the assessment of the <i>student</i> , not the teacher. Reading hundreds of apps = no time for extras
Compare students	We read by school so we'll often encounter both students on either end of the comparison
Physical Features:	Seems like a given, but do <i>not</i> comment on the student's physical features—we

often read recs from the same teachers over and over again and you want to protect your reputation

Repeat Resume: Student's resume is elsewhere—no need to repeat it here, unless you've been adviser/coach & can speak to that element of the student's character

DON'T (continued):

False Praise: Hard to write for student who is "fine" but doesn't stand out... but that ends up being a lot of the applicant pool! Don't feel like you have to shower with praise that seems insincere or can't be backed up—we see through it!

DO:

Brief Context: How long you've known, what classes/levels (if high)

Academics: Aside from grades, you're our only impression of classroom performance

Language: Like writing a resume, powerful language goes a lot way

Examples: Stories are much more meaningful than baseless comments

Brief: Shouldn't be more than a page unless there's a very specific circumstance

Limitations: Ok to address but provide more positives than negatives