Tips for Writing Letters of Recommendation

**DOs**
- Provide context for letter and applicant
- Personalize it – use examples
- Set the tone: Greatest enthusiasm = outstanding
  Great enthusiasm = excellent
  Enthusiasm = very good
- Be specific
- Be consistent
- Ensure that words used match student’s record
- Emphasize by bolding or underlining
- Use descriptive words
- Use examples

**DON’T INCLUDE**
- Information that does not reflect your own experience
- Information found in the CV
- Wrong information

**AVOID**
- Clichés
- Over-the-top superlatives
- Generalities that are not supported with examples
- Typos, grammatical errors, etc.
- Promoting yourself instead of promoting the student

**KEEP IN MIND**
- Does the applicant’s story require context or perspective?
- Is the applicant multi-dimensional?
Before Agreeing to Write the Letter:

- Use discernment (self and other) when agreeing to write the letter.
- Do you have enough information?
- Be committed to doing it and to doing it the right way.

Order of the Letter:

1. State the relationship
   - What is your relationship and how long?
2. Level of enthusiasm for applicant (“great or greatest”)
3. Include the job description
   - Why is the person applying and are they able to succeed? Provide evidence.
4. Examples of activities that contribute to the success of the applicant
5. Personal qualities
   - Show understanding and relationship
6. Final conclusions for impact

Material excerpted from Tips for Writing Letters of Recommendation for Students Applying to Medical School presentation by Dr. Stephen Nicholas and Dr. Patrice Spitalnik

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