

Guidelines: Letters of Recommendation for Fellowship Applicants



Letters of recommendation from faculty for a student applying for a prestigious fellowship are incredibly important. Even with a strong academic record, students without strong letters of recommendation are unlikely to win the award – the application must be a complete package.

Since writing a letter for graduate school versus a prestigious scholarship is different, this document has been created in attempt to assist faculty in writing these letters. In addition to this information, the Associate Director for Fellowships in the University Honors Program is happy to read drafts of letters and offer suggestions, should you like additional assistance. Laura Cotten can be reached at 937-229-5415 or [lcotten1\(a\)udayton.edu](mailto:lcotten1(a)udayton.edu)

Similarities in Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School and International Scholarships

- Letter will establish who you are
- Letter will establish how you know the applicant, for how long, and in what capacity
- Letter will heavily use anecdotes to support contentions
- Letter will appraise the quality of the student's participation in various activities, rather than simply list them
- Letter will include a “ranking” statement, such as “In my N years of teaching, I've seen the following type of students at X, Y, and Z universities, and I put her in the P percentile of these students”

Similarities with Graduate School Applicants

- Letter will describe and give context for the academic background of the applicant
- Letter will focus on the potential of the student to do successful graduate level work
- Letter will identify things the applicant has done to suggest a skill set compatible with research and successful graduate study
- Letter will usually be 1-2 pages in length (check length or form needed BEFORE you begin writing.)

The recommender will usually spend less time on the student's character or leadership capabilities in these letters.

Recommendations for Fellowship Applicants

These recommendations will/may:

- Discuss both the student's character and his or her intellectual talents, in similar measure if possible
- Discuss the appropriateness and rigor of the applicant's proposed course of study – is this the next logical step for the applicant? Why?
- Comment on the applicant's flexibility, ability to negotiate a new environment, and tolerance for change
- Describe other cultural experiences the student has had and indicate a degree of cultural sensitivity
- Indicate a level of self-motivation, self-directedness, and independence
- Comment on the applicant's ability to represent the U.S. well and promote a deeper understanding of the country
- Comment on the applicant's potential to “make a difference in the world”
- Have a unique length range dependent on the award to which the student is applying

In addition, each program will ask recommenders to comment on **specific characteristics** of the applicant. Be sure to read these instructions, usually found on the recommendation form, carefully and respond specifically to the requested information. See Addendum for summary of specifications by program.

Tips

Since scholarship reviewers may be reading hundreds of applications at a time, it is an advantage to the candidate if you use some of the following in structuring your recommendation:

- Paragraph headings or headlines
- Bolding
- Bullets
- A strong summary last paragraph
- If you are new to writing letters of recommendation for international scholarships (or if you'd simply like feedback), feel free to request that a member of the Scholarship Committee review your letter if it would be helpful to you. You can contact Associate Director, Laura Cotten, at 937-229-5415 or [lcotten1\(@\)u Dayton.edu](mailto:lcotten1@udayton.edu).

Student Information

In order to write a strong letter of recommendation you will need to know quite a bit about the applicant, their interests, and the program they are applying for. It is appropriate to ask for this information if the student does not volunteer it.

Additional Resources

Joe Schall has an excellent commentary on what specific national fellowships are looking for in a letter. Please find his suggestions at:

<https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingrecommendationlettersonline/node/138>

Writing a Strong Letter of Recommendation: Specifics for National Fellowships

The **Fulbright scholarship** expects students to have a maturity of character for a successful study abroad experience whether it includes teaching English, doing research or earning a graduate degree. Students must hold a bachelor's degree for this experience.

- Strong level of knowledge and potential for future growth in the chosen field
- Ability to carry out research (if applicable) and think and write analytically
- Emotional stability, maturity, motivation and seriousness of purpose
- Appropriate linguistic preparation and ability to adapt to a different cultural environment
- A proposed project that is feasible and has merit
- Likelihood of making a favorable impression as a United States citizen abroad

The **Gates Cambridge Scholarship** is looking for students wanting to attend graduate school at the University of Cambridge for one to four years. Leaders who discuss global concerns such as social equity, health and the role of technology are encouraged to apply.

- The student's aptitude for advanced research analysis, and creativity at defining and solving relevant problems
- The ability of the student to use his or her education "for the benefit of others and to improve the common weal"
- Your opinion of the student's language proficiency if the applicant's native tongue is not English

The **Goldwater scholarship** expects the students to have proven academic excellence and a drive to achieve a Ph.D. in science, technology, engineering or math. May apply as a sophomore or junior.

- Potential and intent for a career in mathematics, the natural sciences, or those engineering disciplines that contribute significantly to technological advances
- The ability and desire to pursue advanced degrees in the sciences and engineering
- Developed career objectives and involvement in an academic program that fosters the student's ability to make a significant contribution to the chosen field
- Demonstrated outstanding academic performance, maturity, initiative, and motivation

The **Marshall Scholarship** expects the student to have an excellent academic record and a strong desire to study at an institution in the United Kingdom:

- Distinction of intellect and character as evidenced both by a student's scholastic attainments and by his or her other activities and achievements
- Adequate preparation for the proposed course of study, particular in upper-level course work, and demonstrated strength in the major field
- The student's ability to play an active part in the life of the UK university, with potential to make a significant contribution to his or her own society

The **Mitchell Scholarship** is looking for students with an interest in attending graduate school in Ireland. Two important areas to focus on are service and leadership.

- Documented evidence of a student's achievements in academics, leadership and service
- Ability and maturity to pursue advanced study at an Irish university of the student's choosing
- If appropriate, commentary on how the student's proposed plan of study could contribute to US-Ireland relations

The **NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program** considers the value and efficacy of the student's research project. They look for intellectual merit and broader impacts the research may provide.

- Potential and intent for a career in science, mathematics, or engineering, with specific attention to research ability or teaching aptitude (includes some areas of psychology)
- The ability and desire to pursue a Ph.D. in science, mathematics or engineering and make contributions to research in the field
- Demonstrated excellence in academics, especially as reflected by research experience, GPA, GRE scores, or other appropriate qualitative or quantitative data.

The **Rhodes Scholarship** is the highest academic accolade a young scholar may receive. Of utmost importance is a desire to study at the University of Oxford.

- Proven intellectual and academic quality of the highest standard (4.0 GPA or close)
- The student's integrity of character, and demonstrated interest in and respect for their fellow beings
- The ability to lead and the energy to use their talents to the full

The **Truman Scholarship** is for students interested in a career in the government, education, the military and non-profit public service organizations and advocacy groups.

- Criteria are dependent on the letter you are writing, and are well-documented on your nominee's cover letter.
- Potential topics include: leadership abilities and potential, student's leadership abilities and potential, student's commitment to a career in public service, or the student's intellect and prospects for continuing academic success

The **Udall Scholarship** expects students to be concerned about environmental public policy or be of a Native American or Alaska Native decent interested in Tribal public policy or Native Health Care.

- Evidence of and continued potential for academic success
- The student's level of interest in the environment (or Tribal public policy or Native health care)
- The student's communication skills, especially as they might be employed in relation to chosen career path
- The student's potential to have an impact on his or her field.

**Sources used to compile guidelines include the materials distributed by the National Association of Fellowship Advisors and "Writing Recommendation Letters" by Joe Schall.*