

WRITING RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Getting Started:

Make sure you include:

- Applicant's full name, field of study and country of application as well as recommender's contacts, full name, title and signature.
- Period and context in which he/she has known the applicant
- A brief but detailed description of the course/program the recommender teaches

What the letter itself should contain:

As the writer of a Fulbright Scholarship recommendation letter, you have the unique opportunity to communicate directly with the scholarship selection committee on behalf of the applicant. The letter you write can give the selection committee a deeper level of insight on the character of the applicant. However, while a great recommendation letter will bolster an application, a poorly written or misguided recommendation letter can actually hurt an applicant's chances of receiving a scholarship for his or her proposed project. Therefore, writing a genuine, energetic, and effective recommendation letter is very important, and you may find it helpful to consider the following guidelines:

- Joe Schall suggests in his *Writing Recommendation Letters: A Faculty Handbook* that the following information about your applicant should be covered in a Fulbright Scholarship recommendation letter:
 - Strong level of knowledge and potential for future growth in the chosen field;
 - Ability to carry out research 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;
 - Why the applicant's proposed project that is feasible and has merit;
 - Likelihood of making a favorable impression as a [Czech] citizen abroad.

In addition, you should address:

- The candidate's strong level of English
- Capacity to adjust to a new cultural environment
- Why the candidate deserves the Fulbright grant and why it is necessary for him/her to study/do research in the US.

When writing the letter:

- Don not focus too much on information that can be inferred simply by looking at the transcript, such as the general academic excellence of the applicant. The selection committee will receive many academically strong applicants, so your letter should help the applicant stand out from the pack by offering new information.

- “It is vital that a letter of support offers some detail that fits only that individual being recommended, and that the recommender comments specifically on the student’s plan of study.”ⁱ You should SHOW, not TELL, the selection committee why the applicant is the best choice, by including a short story or detail about the applicant that backs up positive claims you have made about the student
- Remember that short recommendation letters (one to two paragraphs) are generally not as effective as longer letters with more detail.

Links to examples and guidelines from American universitiesⁱⁱ:

Sample Recommendation Letter:

http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/rec_letter/sample_letter.html

About Recommendation Letters:

<http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~natalia/studyinus/guide/recom.htm>

Letters of Recommendation: <http://www.mbaprograms.org/mbacareer/references.asp>

About the process and the letter: <http://www.princeton.edu/career/alumni/grad-prof/law/letters>

Advice to letter writers: <http://www.cs.brown.edu/~sk/Memos/Grad-School-Recos/>

Advice: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x5550.xml>

http://newsletter.fulbrightonline.org/older_newsletters/www.imakenews.com/fulbright/e_article000296061.html

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~scholarship/docs/recommenderguidelines.pdf>

<http://www.writeexpress.com/reference-letter.html>

ⁱ Joe Schall. *Writing Recommendation Letters: A Faculty Handbook*. Outernet Publishing: Eden Prairie, MN, 2002.

ⁱⁱ “Recommendation Letters-Tips for Referees.” Fulbright: Romania.