Chapter 5  Recommendations

OUTLINE OF A COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION

Develop an outline
• Organize facts into topic areas (academic, extracurricular, athletic, etc.).
• Where does the student’s strength emerge?
• Develop main points you want to bring out about the student in each area.
• Determine the overall picture/theme/impression you want to convey about the student.
• Provide supporting facts/observations/anecdotes.
• Include adjectives that describe the student.

Paragraph 1
• Introduce the student.
• Establish your relationship with the student—how long have you known him/her? In what context? How long has she/he been at your school? If the student did not begin at your school, where did he/she transfer from?
• Introduce the main theme(s) you plan to develop, along with special circumstances or family situations germane to the student.

Paragraph 2
(Include any of the items listed that are relevant to the student.)
• Summary comment on strength of the student’s academic work.
• Discussion of academic skills/qualities.
• Strength of the program of study relative to other students. Point out what may not be obvious in the transcript—special courses, school limitations on offerings, unusual grading policies, etc.
• Grades that stand out—a good grade from a difficult teacher, or a maverick low grade that does not fit with overall performance.
• Academic honors, relative standing in class.
• Potential for growth.
• Potential to do college-level work.
• Performance relative to ability.
• Motivation, curiosity, and other subjective qualities (anecdotal support is very important here).
• Unusual circumstances that may have affected performance.
• Quotations from teachers or anecdotal evidence to support evaluative statements.

Paragraph 3
(Include any of the items listed that are relevant to the student.)
• Area(s) of participation in extracurriculars, degree of involvement.
• Area(s) of true excellence, impact on your campus, impact on college campus (at what level, if you feel qualified to comment).
• Unusual time commitment, time commitment in regard to academic load.
• Leadership, respect of peers/faculty.
• Honors/distinctions/awards.
• Personal observations, faculty comments, anecdotal support.

Paragraph 4 (optional)
• A paragraph about noteworthy accomplishments away from school (summer activities, community service, part-time job).
• A paragraph about personal qualities and traits if not adequately developed in paragraphs 2 and 3. (If you are going to personalize/editorialize in a recommendation, do so in this paragraph; you should clearly state that you are doing so.)

Paragraph 5 (concluding paragraph)
• Summary statement of overall performance and impact on school community.
• Restatement of main theme(s) about the student.
• Estimation of future performance.
• Overall recommendation of the student.

Your lead paragraph creates an image for the reader that the body of your recommendation should develop. Your concluding paragraph conveys the strength of your endorsement and tends to stay with the reader. These portions of your recommendation should be given special care; you should also include anecdotal information/specific references whenever possible.

Source: The College Board