

Please! Please! Please! Please!*

or,

Notes on Requesting a College Recommendation

Yes: I am leaving CAC. But I am still looking forward to helping you in your college application process. So I need your help. My greatest contribution will be a well-written and insightful letter of recommendation. Please allow me the time necessary to draft and revise those letters and also provide me a little inspiration.

Please read these notes carefully.

1. GENERAL ADVICE

Manage your applications. Consider which teachers you will ask for recommendations and also which “you” you would like them to portray. In other words, you are a multi-faceted individual. As a result, you should select recommenders who can provide diverse yet complementary observations.

I encourage requests for letters of recommendation in which students ask me to emphasize particular aspects of their performance, service, or personality. If I am uncomfortable about complying with a particular request, I will tell you when you ask for the letter.

2. PAPERWORK, INCLUDING THE ELECTRONIC KINDS

Please follow all the instructions that you receive from your counselors. I will look forward to reading your “blue sheets.” Since English teachers are asked to write many college recommendations and since I prefer to dedicate the bulk of my time to drafting and revising my letters, you will need to perform your set-up functions with the Naviance service before I can contribute my work.

3. THE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Since it is better to “show” than to “tell,” I like to offer anecdotes that reveal you in a positive light. As part of your request for recommendations, you must please draft a short retelling of a moment we shared that you believe best illustrates the traits you would like me to reveal to the admissions committees.

Not surprisingly, since my perceptions of your high school experience often differ from yours, students frequently remember moments that I have forgotten, or remember differently. The better your retelling of this moment, the greater the likelihood that you will jog or modify my memory, and the better the final recommendation. Provide specific exposition details about the time and place of the action, and review any sensory details or other vital information that you think relevant. The information you provide will be very helpful, but keep in mind that I may elect to tell a different tale.

If your anecdote is especially insightful and well written, I may borrow some of your writing to support my evaluative claims about you and your writing ability. In the best cases, I will enjoy quoting from your writing in order to support my claim that you are an effective persuasive writer. In other words, I like to sneak an extra bit of your writing into your college application packet.

A brief aside on waivers: while I will always support your right to read my recommendations if you matriculate at a college that keeps them on file, you should know there is anecdotal evidence from admissions officers that suggests that colleges take less seriously recommendations written for students who have not waived their right to read them. My feeling is that you will want my letter to support your application as effectively as possible and if I have agreed to recommend you, I will be offering honest and positive portrayals. But the decision about whether to waive is yours.

4. PLAN AHEAD

All requests for recommendations should be submitted at least six (6) weeks before my deadline.

5. WHAT ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT?

I am happy to read and respond to your personal statements. My first reading of your essay presents my best opportunity to anticipate the responses of the strangers who will evaluate your application. As odd as this may sound, I can only read your essay a first time once. After that first reading, I will be able to remember your draft.

As a result, I recommend that you polish your draft until you are satisfied before showing me your work.

At that point, we can arrange for me to read your statement in roughly the amount of time that will be allotted to it by admissions officers and tell you whether I like your essay and would be interested in inviting you to join my community.

We can meet additional times after that first meeting to discuss additional revisions.

* That's right, I cribbed the title from the late Mr. Dynamite, the Hardest Working Man in Show Business, The Godfather of Soul, Soul Brother No. 1: Mr. James Brown. I borrow from the best. Don't try this at home: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vruiy2GRUsV8>