



June 2, 2021

Dear Potential Letter of Recommendation Writer:

You are being approached by an applicant to write a recommendation for a scholarship or fellowship for which the competition will be very strong. This applicant believes that you are uniquely qualified to comment in some detail on his or her academic achievements (or perhaps character). Because of the importance of these letters in national competition and because the nature of the letter is somewhat different from other letters we write, here are some things you may wish to consider in writing the letter:

- Address the letter “Dear [Insert Scholarship Name] Selection Committee:” Write the letter on letterhead, and include your written signature as well as your title in the signature line.
- Before agreeing to write the letter, you may find it useful to assess the extent to which you know this applicant’s academic or character strengths and academic accomplishments. If you do not know the applicant beyond the graded work for the course, you might write a helpful letter for employment or graduate school, but the letter will be of little use and could be harmful at the level of national competition, and it is perhaps better to decline the request. It is also obviously better to decline if you have reservations about the strengths of this applicant; negative remarks will almost certainly contribute to the detriment of the applicant’s application.
- If you agree to write the letter, please take some time to discuss with the applicant his or her academic curriculum at UNC (and perhaps abroad), plans for graduate work and other related activities. Ask the applicant to provide you with copies of papers and other submitted work written for your course that contain your remarks.
- You may also consider answering the following questions in writing the letter:
 - Did you have interaction with the applicant outside class hours?
 - Is it possible you could share an anecdote that might capture the applicant’s strengths or further bring the applicant to life for the reader?
 - What truly makes this applicant unique in your eyes?
 - Is this an applicant you can honestly say is among best applicants in however many years you’ve been teaching?
- Again, only in detail can a letter truly assist the applicant in winning these scholarships.

If you have any questions about deadlines, the format in which the letter is to be submitted, or more, please contact our office (ods@unc.edu; 919-843-7757).

Thank you for your assistance to this applicant. I am personally aware of the time that goes into the preparation of a strong letter and the gathering of information that it entails.

Sincerely,

Inger Brodey
Director, Office of Distinguished Scholarships
Professor of English and Comparative Literature