LETTERS IN 30 MINUTES OR LESS!

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Covered in this session...

From The Admissions Counselor
■ What makes an effective letter in the evaluation process
■ What isn’t helpful in a letter

From The College Guidance Counselor
■ Your own letter style
■ Form letters, habits, and systems to make writing faster
From The Admissions Counselor

- Features of All Star Letters
- What Doesn’t Work
- For the Stand Out Student
- For Everyone Else
Features of All-Star Letters

■ Context
- “Victoria takes the bus to school—a 1.5 hour commute each way—which limits her ability to participate in extra curricular activities.”
- “Joe is responsible for his younger siblings on the days his mother works the night shift, and so has arranged to end his day early to pick up his sister from daycare.”

■ Perspective
- “Maybe two students complete an independent study each year, and it is usually the student’s last priority. Not Grace. She fully committed to her course.”
- “We don’t often allow a junior to take the History Seminar, but Ciel argued for it so well our Senior Academic Team decided to take a chance.”
Features of All-Star Letters

■ Real Superlatives
  - “Hugo is the most talented writer that I have ever worked with.”
  - “No other student in our school has ever received an A in all three of these classes.”

■ Tidbits and Anecdotes
  - “I can depend on Omar to help anyone who is in need. Last year, a student couldn’t get a ride to the AP US History exam because of car trouble; he called Omar who detoured 30 minutes out of his way to get the student and upon pulling up to the test site Omar had time to hand me his keys (to move his car out of the no-parking lane) before they both ran in to make the 8:00 start time.”
What doesn’t work?

■ The Standard Praise (without evidence)
  - “Brian immediately impressed me with his thoughtful approach to his school work. He is an excellent student and I know he will be successful in whatever he does.”
  - “Adriana has proven to be the well rounded student who possesses the necessary skills to thrive at the next level. She is deserving of all the praise and accolades that come her way.”

■ The Personal Bio

■ The Mean, or Usage of Stereotypes
What doesn’t work?

■ The Resume

- “Olivia is a well rounded student in terms of her extracurricular activities and volunteerism. She has participated in a handful of campus clubs. She has challenged herself by taking on leadership roles within those clubs such as Secretary of the Feminist Club. She has invested numerous hours over the past four years for the Read Across America program.”

- “Carson has taken a rigorous course load at our high school, including Honors and AP classes. He excelled in two AP courses his junior year and is currently enrolled in four more. Carson has held an A/B average throughout the course of his high school career, earning a current grade point average of 3.87.”
For the Stand Out Students

■ Break the form letter.
■ Show enthusiasm!
■ Back it up.

“Maria inspires me. The world would be a better place if we were a little more like her.”

“There aren’t enough words to describe the level of potential I see in Alex.”

“In 21 years, I have written a number of recommendations for students. Some of these have been an honor; some of these have been an annoyance trying to search my mind for vocabulary to mask the mediocrity of a student. Today, I would like to introduce you to Madison Kim who just about epitomizes everything a student should be, but also goes well-beyond that definition.”
For Everyone Else

■ Tepid praise is useless
  - “I am pleased to write on his behalf.”
  - “In his classes, Waseem is a diligent student and conscientious of due dates.”
  - “In addition to her dedication to academics, Cayley participates in many extra curricular activities.”

■ Personality quirks are membrable
  - “Matt is the kind of student who works tirelessly to achieve his goals, and has a color-coded system to ensure he never misses a deadline. I’ve freshman asking to be taught his system at lunch, and he’s eager to share what’s worked.”
  - “Kristi is an all-state softball player who plays the ukulele in weekly chapel services and can debate on the best fried chicken in town.”
From the College Guidance Counselor

Useful Questions:
- What Moment Tells It All?
- Would You Show This to Your Principal?
- What Does It Mean In Your Community?
- What’s She Like in Person?
- Do I Need To Make Someone Cry?
A Moment: What Story Tells It All?

- Falling over the hurdle – and somersaulting!
- Directing unruly kids at all-school mass
- Sleeping in the hallway during mom’s chemo
- Reporting a bully, or a suicidal friend
- Only kid allowed to take this class combo, win this award twice, freshman on JV team
Would You Show This to Your Principal?

- Record of academics
- Record of community participation
- Record of personal growth

- Good letters, even with little contact.
- Great letters, given lots of contact!
What Does It Mean In Your Community?

- Fashion Show = Hunger Games of $$$
- Cultural Night = A Year of Effort
- Dance Team = Our Football Team
- Ambassadors = Pitching to Donors
- #ArcherProud = Spoke at City Hall
- Student Store = She’s CEO, and raised $$$
What’s She Like In Person?

- Do the interview for them.
- Describe kid’s air, manner, and approach.
- Never describe physical characteristics.
- ‘Gush Meeting’ + typing = letter.
Do I Need To Make Them Cry?

- A story the student will never tell
- Impacts academic record
- Explains manner and approach
- Use in cases of abuse, neglect, poverty
- Do not use for disappointment or drama
- Get permission if possible, never share letter
It is my pleasure to recommend NAME. She is a WORD, WORD, and WORD young woman. She has been a WORD member of our community and is poised for success in the next four years.

Academically she has ... Senior class choices as expression of interest, overcoming challenges / GPA, test scores, etc ... / Quotes from teachers / Classes as relates to future major or plans

Outside of the classroom she has ... activities related to school / activities not related to school / leadership / activities as related to future activities

Personally she is ... character / family issues that are relevant / qualities as relate to future plans

In short, she is WORD. I recommend her WORD. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance to this find young person.
Systems That Help: Naviance Journal

- Stories as you see them unfold to hear them
- Teacher quotes
- Articles from the paper
- Awards
- Peer comments
- Parent letters
Systems That Help: Technology!

- Blank letter, with signature, saved
- LAST NAME, FIRST NAME YEAR
- Speech recognition software
- Sort by deadline date
- Sort by GPA – start in the middle
- Out of office response
QUESTIONS?

Stories of Success?
Thank you!

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