

## Writing Letters of Recommendation for Students with Disabilities

Typical letters of recommendation are used to gather additional information about a candidate for employment, graduate study, or other opportunities. The letter should give an overall picture of the candidate's:

- personal characteristics
- performance
- experience
- strengths
- capabilities
- professional promise

Preferably, the person writing the letter of recommendation has been in a working or academic relationship with the applicant.

For students with disabilities, the intent of a letter of recommendation is no different. Though these students have a collegiate experience that is various ways distinct from that of some peers, students with disabilities are looking for a recommendation no different than one given to any other student.

However, your unique experiences with a student based on aspects their disability might complicate the process when sitting down to write a letter of recommendation. Below are some frequently fielded questions that you may encounter when drafting letters of recommendation for students with disabilities:

### ***Should I disclose the student's disability in the letter of recommendation?***

Usually, the answer is no. Regardless of the unique abilities of the student, a letter of recommendation is a time to accentuate those characteristics that qualify the student for the position which they seek. In most cases, a student's disability is not something to intentionally conceal from the opportunity provider; rather, the disability is often simply irrelevant.

### ***What if the student's disability could affect their performance or success in a given endeavor?***

The purpose of a letter of recommendation is to provide an accurate portrayal of a student's performance, experience, strengths, and capabilities. It is not the role of a recommendation author to disclose medical information to the prospective opportunity provider. Through other aspects of the acceptance or hiring process (interviews, resumes, cover letters, etc.), the candidate will disclose relevant information, such as a disability, to the opportunity provider.

For example, if the candidate requires extended time to complete some tasks, the opportunity provider and candidate will discuss possible obstacles and/or accommodations at a time appropriate in the application process.

### ***I want to mention the student's disability. How should I approach it?***

Some recommendation drafters might desire to mention the student's disability to accentuate the student's capacity to overcome adversity in a society frequently placing barriers in her/his way. For example, a reference author might desire to remark on a student's ability to advocate for themselves and others particularly well because of the unique experiences they encounter with their disability. The student may also be distinctly proficient at adapting to sudden change or for the purpose of overcoming obstacles because of their disability. Though the student may have developed these skills more thoroughly because of the disability, the disability itself remains irrelevant. The goal of your reference letter is to highlight those skills which make the candidate exemplary, not the means by which they obtained those skills. If you still wish to elude to a student's disability in her/his recommendation letter, it is highly suggested that you disclose this intention to the student. It is important that you abide the student's wishes concerning the inclusion of disability in the reference letter.

### ***I have other questions, who should I contact?***

When it comes to questions concerning students, the Learning Support Services for Students with Disabilities (LSS) office is a resource for you. Our office is open Monday-Friday, 8:00am-5:00pm. You can also contact us by phone at 503-352-2194 or via email at [lss@pacificu.edu](mailto:lss@pacificu.edu).