Dear Recommender:

As the pre-law advisors on campus, we would like to thank you for your work with the pre-law students, particularly your willingness to write a letter of recommendation. Sometimes a strong letter of recommendation can be the deciding factor in a student’s law school admission.

Most law schools prefer that students use the LSAC Credential Assembly Service (CAS) for letters of recommendation. A recommender sends one letter to LSAC and LSAC sends copies of that letter to all schools to which the student is applying. A handful of schools still prefer that the letters of recommendation come to the school directly from the recommenders. That is increasingly rare, and it is the student’s responsibility to tell the recommender exactly where the letters should go and to provide proper envelopes and postage.

There seems to be some confusion regarding the proper timeline for law school recommendations. January 15th is likely to be the first official deadline a student will encounter. However, most law schools operate on a “rolling admissions” basis, whereby they start reviewing applications, and often extending offers of admission, as early as late October or early November. There is a real competitive edge to be gained with an early application; therefore, we urge our students to apply as early as possible in the process.

Please be frank with students about your own timeline for sending the recommendations. If a diligent student submits a law school application early – in November, for example – but a recommender does not send the requested recommendation in November, there are two possible scenarios. In one, the student’s file simply sits somewhere, waiting for the recommendation, costing the student any benefit she may have received from an early application. In the other scenario, the student’s application is reviewed anyway, and a decision is made without benefit of the recommendation. We had several students in this application cycle who received rejections from law schools before the second letters of recommendation even arrived at LSAC. In each situation the student had requested the letter 4-6 months in advance of the rejection.

Please also be candid with the student about the quality of your potential recommendation. If you do not feel able to provide a strong recommendation for a student, please let the student know that and give the student the option of requesting recommendations elsewhere. We have provided the student with two sets of guidelines, one for the student and one for the writer of the recommendation. We have instructed the students to give a copy of this letter and the guidelines to each person from whom they request letters of recommendation.

If there is anything we can do to make the recommendation process easier or more efficient, please let us know.

Best regards,

Pre-Law Advising Team
Office of College Advising
GUIDELINES FOR LAW SCHOOL LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION  
(ACADEMIC)

- Highlight skills law schools are particularly interested in:
  - Critical thinking
  - Logical analysis
  - Ability to read and understand large quantities of complex written information
  - Writing
  - Oral communication
  - Research

- Give concrete examples of how the student exhibited those skills in your class.

- Explain the content of the course(s) and its value, and explain the student’s firm grasp of that content.

- Mention in detail any significant work the student did in your class. For example,

  “Mary Jones wrote a 25-page term paper analyzing the interplay of form and content in Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones.”

- If you can, compare the student favorably to his/her peers. For example,

  “Ms. Jones’ work stood out in her class of forty honor students and I consider her to be among the top 5% of all students I’ve encountered in my 13 years of teaching.”

- If the course is part of an honors program, mention that, and discuss the criteria for participation.

- If the student’s major is impacted and only accepts a small number of applicants, or if the major (or course) has a low curve which makes the grades appear artificially low, explain those circumstances in some detail.

- If you know that the student has a particularly strong knowledge base in some of the content areas useful for a law student, mention that. Those areas include, but are not limited to, the following: U.S. history, western philosophy, U.S. political systems, political theory, economics, accounting, psychology, rhetoric.

- Do not be afraid of detail. General rule: longer recommendations are better.
GUIDELINES FOR LAW SCHOOL LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

(EMPLOYER)

• Highlight skills law schools are particularly interested in:
  □ Critical thinking
  □ Logical analysis
  □ Ability to read and understand large quantities of complex written information
  □ Writing
  □ Oral communication
  □ Research

• Give concrete and detailed examples of how the student exhibited relevant skills in the workplace. For example,

  “I receive over one hundred pieces of correspondence per day. One of William’s primary duties is to read that correspondence each day, analyze the content of each piece, decide which pieces need my attention and which pieces can be delegated to other employees, distribute the pieces to be delegated, and prioritize the remaining pieces for my attention. Because of the nature of our work here at XYZ, Inc., this correspondence often includes very complicated, and highly confidential, subject matter. William consistently exhibits the strong organizational skills, the ethical fiber, and the mental acuity necessary for such a challenging position.”

• If you can, compare the student favorably to his/her peers. For example,

  “Never before in my 15 years of practice have I had a (job title) in whom I could place so much trust and in whom I have had so much confidence.”

• If selection for the position was highly competitive, explain the circumstances in some detail.

• Don’t be afraid to talk some about your own background, the job itself, the kind of business or organization you are, and the history of the employee in the job. That will provide context for your evaluation.

• If you have reason to be competent to evaluate the employee’s suitability for law school, go ahead and do so. If you don’t, leave it out.

• Discuss how much your organization will suffer without the employee but how you’re all excited about her bright future.

• Do not be afraid of detail. General rule: longer recommendations are better.
STUDENT GUIDELINES FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most law schools will require two letters of recommendation. Occasionally, you will be asked for one, three, or even four letters of recommendation. The LSAC Credential Assembly Service (CAS) will process up to four letters and LSAC will send as many letters as the school accepts. It is to your advantage to submit as many quality letters of recommendation as you can that attest to your capacity to succeed in law school and as a lawyer.

Professors are your best recommenders because they are familiar with your academic work and law schools are most interested in your academic ability. If all three recommenders are professors, that’s great. Choose professors who know you well and who can speak in some detail about your academic prowess. If you do academic-type work in your workplace, you might choose to have a supervisor or employer act as your third recommender along with two professor recommenders.

After selecting your recommenders, give them the following items:

1) The attached materials: (a) Letter to recommenders (b) Guidelines for law school recommendations. You will notice that there are two versions of the guidelines, one for professors and one for employers. Be sure to give each recommender the proper version.

2) A packet of materials, including a resume, a copy of your transcript (if your grades are good), a draft of your personal statement, copies of written work submitted for the recommender’s class, and anything else that the recommender specifically requests.

3) A signed LOR Waiver Form and a stamped, addressed envelope -- if the recommender wants to send in a hard copy of the letter. Most recommenders will elect the electronic process. Contact your professor before putting their information into the LSAC website.

Approach your recommenders early—at least 6-8 weeks in advance of the date you’d like the recommendation mailed. Be very clear about the date you need the recommendation to be mailed, and make sure the recommender understands—and is committed to—your application timeline. Check in with your recommender every two weeks until the recommendation is received by CAS. If you find that a professor is not meeting the agreed-upon deadlines, find another recommender ASAP.