



U.S. College Application Training for Teachers



Crafting Effective Recommendation Letters



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Recommendation Letters

- Powerful way for counselors and teachers to advocate for students
- Provide a key source of information about something that test scores and transcripts cannot
- Very important to personalize each recommendation letter

(<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/how-to-write-a-letter-of-recommendation>)



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Recommendation Letters

- Teacher's letter of recommendation:
 - the impact this student has on the classroom
 - the “mind” of the student
 - the student's personality, work ethic and social conduct
- Guidance counselor's letter of recommendation:
 - the student's abilities in context, over time — how do they fit within the school's overall demographics, curriculum, test scores
 - special circumstances beyond the classroom that impact the student

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Recommendation Letters

Assessing Letters of Recommendation:

- 1 - **Top few** of the recommender's career; extraordinary performance and impact in the classroom; multiple examples to illustrate an outstanding mind
- 2 - **Very strong** support; provides clear example(s) of a fine mind; wonderful contributor who elevates discussion with unique insight
- 3 - **Strong** support; excellent student; frequently adds to discussion
- 4 - **Standard positive** support with some examples
- 5 - **Mixed** comments; and/or muted support; and/or absence of examples
- 6 = The recommender **doesn't support** the student or writes particularly negative comments

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Recommendation Letters

- **DO:**

- Be honest – to the student and in the letter.
- Tell a story about what kind of person the student is.
- Pick specific descriptors and back them up with evidence; avoid cliches like “hard-working,” “passionate,” and “team-player.”
- Show good student work. Copy and paste an especially well-written paragraph from the student’s best essay.
- Ask permission if you're going to reveal something private about the student (they have a learning disability, their mother has cancer, they struggle with depression).

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Recommendation Letters

- **DON'T:**

- Write your autobiography. The letter's about the student, not you.
- Repeat a student's resume. Admissions counselors get a copy of that, too. (It is okay if it is a short letter - "Two paragraphs actually specific to the student are so much better than a page of puff.")
- Recycle letters—even those you wrote in previous years. (The same person/team may be reading all of your letters!!!)

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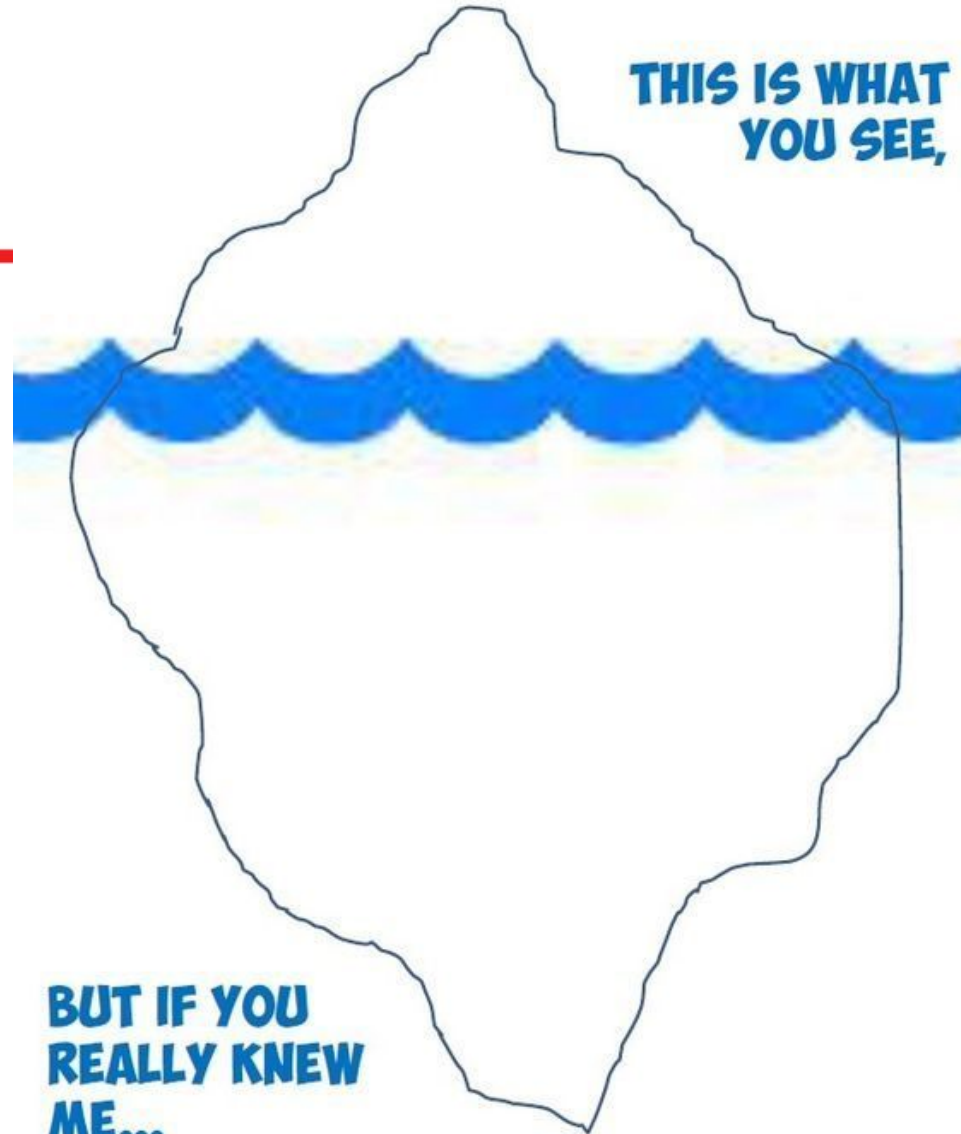
Counseling Skills



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**THIS IS WHAT
YOU SEE,**



**BUT IF YOU
REALLY KNEW
ME...**



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Empathy:

- Empathy versus Sympathy
 - Empathy is connection; Sympathy is disconnection - Brene Brown
- Developing empathy
 - Perspective taking – everyone has their own truths
 - Staying out of judgment
 - Recognizing emotion in others
 - Communicating - Not just about listening; it's about hearing what's unsaid, feeling what's unexpressed.
- A skill that can be developed and refined over time.



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WHY EMPATHY IS IMPORTANT



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Effective Communication Skills:

- Communicate clearly
- Listen to understand (vs. listening to respond)
- Ask open-ended questions
- Do not interrupt
- Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal communication
- Be aware of feelings
- Pay attention to thinking and speaking speed
- Keep an open mind
- Practice!



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What next?



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What do we want for our children (the next generation)?

- Maybe same for our students as well?



COLLEGE



CAREER



SUCCESS



INDEPENDENC
E



HAPPINESS



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Steps to supporting my students

- Learn about opportunities for them
- Learn about our students: their interests, their skills, their circumstances
- Guide them in their definitions of success
- Have faith in them and their dreams
- Support them to access information, opportunities, and resources
 - Share resources, e.g., USEF
 - Organize regular information sessions
 - Advocate for student activities and opportunities
 - Remember it is a team effort to support students



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