

Delivering Teacher Recommendations

Daniel Kopperud Ed.D., Assistant
Director of International Enrollment,
Rochester Institute of Technology

Nancy Weis-Sanfo, College Counselor,
KIS Jeju Campus



REGIONAL INSTITUTE
East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Introduction

- Importance of strong teacher recommendations
- Role of teacher recommendations
 - Differences in the U.S. and UCAS systems
- How to guide teachers in writing effective letters
- Understand what an ineffective letter is



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Understanding Differences within U.S. Universities

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2023

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
High school grades in college prep courses	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Total high school grades (all courses)	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of high school curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Positive character attributes	184	28.3	37.5	18.5	15.8
Essay or writing sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's interest in attending	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor recommendation	185	11.9	40.0	27.6	20.5
Teacher recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Extracurricular activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4

- Holistic review process:
 - Focus on character, leadership, contributions to campus life
- Personalized anecdotes and examples
- Conversational tone, balanced between professionalism and personalization



Understanding Differences with UCAS Admissions

- Focused on academic readiness and subject-specific strengths
- More formal
- Structured and concise with clear predictions of student success

**Section 2: Supportive
Information specific
to the applicant and
college at the
course(s) applied**

Sara is an able and enthusiastic student who has improved and achieved consistently in the first-year units. She is currently resitting her year 1 exams to improve on her grade and I expect her to succeed in doing so. Sara displays evidence of a wide range of background reading of secondary sources which she is then able to translate into classwork and future career plan discussions. Sara works very well in practical, clinical scenario-based sessions and always makes positive and knowledge-based decisions. She also has a keen interest in anatomy and physiology and worked to a high standard in the lessons. I have no doubt that she has the academic and problem-solving skills to successfully complete the course she is applying for. When researching the role she initiated and visited a retired worker to gain insight.

[Resource](#)



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Crafting an Effective Letter of Recommendation

- **Content Strategies**
 - Personalization: Tailor letters to individual students
 - Use specific examples: Highlight academic performance, classroom behavior, contributions, and leadership
 - Address areas of growth in a constructive manner
 - Aligning key traits and achievements with the student's overall application and chosen field
 - Highlighting student involvement beyond the classroom, if applicable
- **Structure**
 - Clear organization: Introduction, body (with examples and analysis), and conclusion
 - Strong, positive language that reflects confidence in the student
 - Avoid vague descriptors and generic phrases



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Navigating Common

Challenges

- Uncooperative teachers
- Weak or generic letters

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am very happy to hear that [redacted] will go to your country to pursue her master study. It gives me great pleasure to write her letter to recommend her to your University.

I began to know [redacted] from 2012 when she enrolled my class. She is outgoing and active in class, so that I got familiar with her soon. She has a solid English foundation that enables her to express herself freely and appropriately.

I believe that she will be an excellent graduate at your university. Thank you for your kind consideration. Please feel free to contact me, if you have any question about [redacted].

Sincerely yours,
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

sire to

since

or all four

room and

ble to

ick wit and

progress.

be very

er master

ttitude, she

i an
lege,
of
own
luate

le
is

ow to
ty

ime
io
e
n

ution

II



REGIONAL INSTITUTE
East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Proactive Approaches for Counselors

- Building a strong recommendation culture
- Offering [workshops](#), timelines and reminders
 - Following up with teachers to ensure deadlines are met and quality is maintained
- Providing successful letter samples
- Showing appreciation



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Ensuring the Best Possible Representation for Students

- Encouraging early discussions between teachers, students, and counselors
 - Are students asking teachers to write?
 - If students are completing brag sheets, should they meet with teachers?
- Advocating for the importance of recommendation letters in shaping a student's application
- Offering feedback on drafts and providing suggestions for improvement



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Role Play

- **Teacher:** You have known the student for two years, but they are not engaged in class and you do not have a personal relationship with them. You are busy with class prep and are not vested in the letter process.
- **College Counselor:** You want to suggest ways to include concrete examples of when the student was successful, and focus less on the ECs. Your goal is to help motivate the teacher so that they are more open to representing the student in a better way.

In my classes they have been moderately successful and in science, they earned scores that are usually quite good. They are learning the basics at this point. On the more recent materials they are struggling but I am expecting to see some improvement. I understand that his focus in university is engineering, so I am sure that they will make more efforts to understand the material in order to be better prepared for the demanding coursework.

Prior to his joining my class I did not know they were so involved in biological science related EC activities. I am told that they participated in a competition. So their interests are quite varied as their brag sheet I have read has attested to, but I can only really speak on the things they have done above with any degree of personal knowledge.

I believe they are a capable student and could be successful in situations in which they are determined to do well. If they want to study engineering, and is serious about it, they will make it happen.

Role Play

- **Teacher:** You have known the student for two years. You're not sure how to best articulate their strengths.
- **College Counselor:** You want to suggest ways to include concrete examples, personal anecdotes, and connections between the student's class performance and their potential for success in college. Your goal is to help the teacher strengthen their letter so that it stands out to admissions officers.

I am pleased to recommend W Choi, who was a student in my AP class during the 2024 school year. W is one of the most genuinely honest students I have had the pleasure of teaching. His introspective nature stood out, as he was always fully aware of his strengths and areas for improvement. This self awareness drove him to seek out feedback that would help him grow, showing a level of maturity and responsibility that is rare.

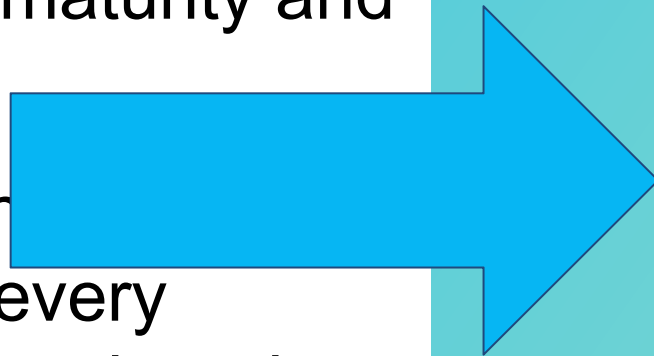
What impressed me most about W was his focus on skill development rather than grades. In every conversation we had, his concern was not about how to earn a higher grade but how he could improve the areas where he felt he needed more growth. This honesty in recognizing his own challenges, paired with his dedication to self improvement, was a testament to his integrity and work ethic.

W's commitment to personal growth and his genuine pursuit of knowledge will serve him well in any future academic or professional setting.

I am pleased to recommend W Choi, who was a student in my AP class during the 2024 school year. W is one of the most genuinely honest students I have had the pleasure of teaching. His introspective nature stood out, as he was always fully aware of his strengths and areas for improvement. This self awareness drove him to seek out feedback that would help him grow, showing a level of maturity and responsibility that is rare.

What impressed me most about W was his focus on skill development rather than grades. In every conversation we had, his concern was not about how to earn a higher grade but how he could improve the areas where he felt he needed more growth. This honesty in recognizing his own challenges, paired with his dedication to self improvement, was a testament to his integrity and work ethic.

W's commitment to personal growth and his genuine pursuit of knowledge will serve him well in any future academic or professional setting.



I am pleased to recommend W Choi, who was a student in my AP class during the 2024 school year...

Throughout the foundational stages of his mock Individual Written Argument (IWA), W demonstrated his commitment to refining his skills. He met with me multiple times to refine his research question, working diligently to make it more focused based on the pre research he had uncovered. Additionally, W was intentional about the sources he used for the IWA, meeting with me regularly to understand the differences between Tier 1, 2, and 3 sources in preparation for his official IWA. His approach to the research process reflected a thoroughness and dedication to academic rigor.

What impressed me most about W was...

Practical Tips for Strong Recommendations

- Use specific examples
- Tailor letters to specific colleges when possible
- Highlight unique attributes
- Align letter's content with the student
- Remember: the letter is about the student, not the recommender
- What about a writing assistant like ChatGPT?



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Exa

- “Pleas
- for St
- Incl
- Mer
- “int
- pass
- offe
- not
- I hav
- beir

It is with great pleasure that I write to recommend Student A for admission to X University. Over the past four years, I have had the privilege of watching Student A grow into a remarkable individual who brings a passion for learning and an inquisitive mind to every challenge she encounters. Her dedication to both engineering and biology sets her apart, and I believe she will be an exceptional addition to your academic community.

As a long-standing member of our school’s robotics club, Student A has consistently demonstrated an eagerness to explore topics far beyond what is taught in the classroom. Her curiosity and drive to understand the "why" behind every concept make her not only a diligent student but also a leader among her peers. Whether it’s tackling complex engineering problems or diving deep into biological processes, Student A is always eager to apply herself and learn from every experience.

In the classroom, she offers unique perspectives that encourage deeper discussions, helping others to see problems from new angles. One of her most admirable qualities is her fearlessness when it comes to making mistakes. She understands that failure is often the key to innovation, and this mindset has not only helped her grow but has also inspired those around her.

On a personal level, Student A is known for her polite, thoughtful, and studious nature. She is the kind of student who quietly excels while also uplifting those around her with kindness and support. Her genuine passion for both engineering and biology, paired with her dedication to learning, makes her an ideal candidate for X University.

I wholeheartedly recommend Student A, confident that she will bring her passion, curiosity, and unique perspectives to your university. I have no doubt that she will thrive in your program and continue to pursue her academic and personal goals with the same determination and grace that she has shown over the past four years.

ing
etter

n”

on for

Enhancing Recommendation Success

- Recap of recommendation strategies:
 - Personalization of academic capacity
 - Focus on character attributes
- Long-term strategies for maintaining a high-quality recommendation process in schools
- Impact of strong teacher recommendations on admissions outcomes



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024

Q&A

Daniel Kopperud Ed.D., dpkges@rit.edu

Nancy Weis-Sanfo, nweissanfo@kis.ac

Workshop



REGIONAL INSTITUTE

East Asia, Southeast Asia,
and Oceania 2024