
EDUCATIONAL CAREER SERVICES

At the end of their student teaching semester, student teachers in elementary and secondary education programs traditionally request that their cooperating teachers and university supervisors write letters of recommendation. Although they are not required to write letters of recommendation, both cooperating teachers and university supervisors generally do write these letters because they realize that school personnel directors and other school administrators consider their recommendations the two most important recommendations for teaching candidates.

Letters of recommendation from cooperating teachers and university supervisors provide potential employers with a professional assessment of the student teacher's performance during the student teaching experience and projections of the student teacher's suitability for future employment. Employers indicate that the information they want to see in the letters of recommendation provided by cooperating teachers and university supervisors includes the following: a description of the student teaching assignment; a description of the student teacher's responsibilities; an assessment of the student teacher's academic preparation; a description of the student teacher's teaching ability; and related information, such as the student teacher's personal qualities exhibited in her/his daily interaction with students, teachers, administrators, parents and others in the school setting.

Suggestions on Content

Letters of recommendation generally contain the following basic information:

Description of the Student Teaching Assignment

- Name, type, and size of school
- Beginning and ending dates of student teaching
- Length of assignment: 1/2 or full day.

Description of Student Teaching Responsibilities

- Subject and grades taught
- Type and number of teaching preparations
- Type and number of students taught
- Type of class arrangement (self-contained, open, etc.)
- Type of instruction (individualized, group, or both)
- Specific lessons, units, text chapters taught
- Responsibilities of student testing and evaluation
- Extracurricular responsibilities
- Other responsibilities

Description of Student Teacher's Academic Preparation

- Description of the currentness, depth and breadth of academic preparation for the student teaching assignment
- Description of the student teacher's comprehension of fundamental principles of the discipline as well as areas of specialization of knowledge

Description of Student Teacher's Teaching Abilities

- An assessment of student teacher's abilities to teach subject assigned, including:
 - Ability to assess students' needs
 - Ability to plan and organize lessons, units, and learning activities to meet students' needs
 - Ability to communicate subject matter to students
 - Ability to evaluate effects of teaching on students' learning
- An assessment of the student teacher's ability to improve his/her teaching abilities through self-evaluation and through the evaluation of the cooperating teacher and university supervisor.

Description of Personal Qualities Related to Teaching

Description of the personal qualities related to teaching that recommendation writers feel the student teacher exhibited during his/her daily interaction with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others in the school setting.

Description of Student Teacher's Special Strengths or Needs

- Description of unique talents or areas of expertise exhibited by the student teacher
- Description of areas in which the student teacher may need additional development and knowledge

Statement of Recommendation

A final statement in which the writer of the letter of recommendation recommends the student teacher for employment, possibly specifying particular grade levels (elementary, middle/junior high school, or high school) and subject which might be most appropriate for student teacher's abilities and interests. Writers generally discuss this first with student teachers so that they understand the particular positions students will seek after graduation.

Suggestions on Writing Style

Letters of recommendation, to be useful, should be written in an objective and professional manner. The following are some general suggestions for writing good letters of recommendation:

- All statements should be clear, complete and specific. Readers should not have to question the writer's meaning or intentions and should not misinterpret any part of the letter.
- All comments should be directly related to the observation of the student teaching experience. Non-student teaching related comments on student teacher's qualities or characteristics are inappropriate and irrelevant.
- Well balanced letters of recommendation usually contain statements describing student teachers areas of strength as well as statements describing areas in which student teachers need development.
- Any critical statements should be explained fully. If specific problems are mentioned, the cooperating teacher or university supervisor should fully describe the circumstances or conditions which may have contributed to the problem and the way the student teacher attempted to resolve the problem.
- Letters should be typed and be error-free.
- Letters should be free of stereotyping based on student teachers' gender, race, religion, handicap, or appearance.

Suggestions on Format

Letters of recommendation should be written in business letter format. Refer to the ECSO website, www.education.illinois.edu/ecso. Click on *Job Tools* and then *Business Letters*. In this section, you will find a link for *Business Letter Format*.