

Teacher Recommendations: Tips for Making the Rec Letter Sing

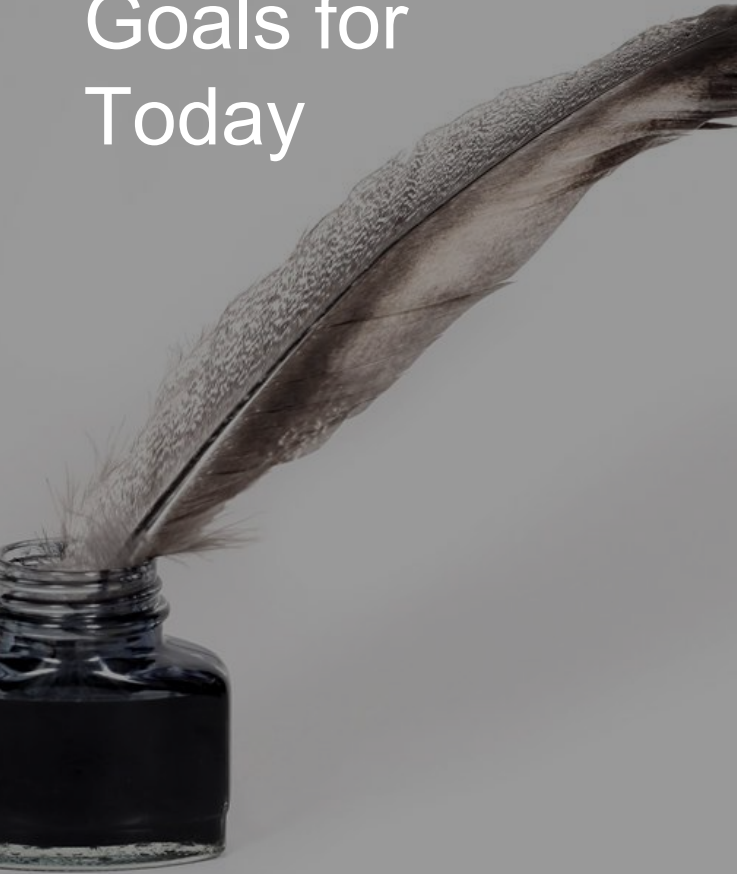
Kevin J. Costa & Alice Margraff, McDonogh
School

Owings Mill, MD 21117

www.mcdonogh.org



Goals for Today



To —

- identify key features of successful teacher recommendations
- practice approaches to preparing the teacher recommendation
- have a practical tutorial to use in your own setting in support of your faculty
 - Drafting template
 - Self-Assessment rubric

Think | Puzzle | Explore

- ❑ What do you **think** you know about what makes a teacher rec successful?
- ❑ What **puzzles** you about making a successful teacher rec?
- ❑ What do you wish to **explore** about successful teacher recs?





Share Out

Key Features of Successful Letters

- Readable in 1 - 2 minutes
- Gets to the “headline” of the student
- Tells a specific story
- Leaves the reader with a clear essence



Example of a Successful Letter

Focus on the opening

██████████ is a scholar in the making. He reads critically and closely, generalizes with strong evidence, reasoning, and judgement, and writes precisely. In a seminar, ██████████ attends to the discourse in a class with considerable diligence and sensitivity. I am more than confident that he will distinguish himself at any college or university lucky enough to enroll him. I urge you to consider his candidacy most seriously.

Example of a Successful Letter

Focus on the opening

██████████ is a scholar in the making. He reads critically and closely, generalizes with strong evidence, reasoning, and judgement, and writes precisely. In a seminar, ██████████ attends to the discourse in a class with considerable diligence and sensitivity. I am more than confident that he will distinguish himself at any college or university lucky enough to enroll him. I urge you to consider his candidacy most seriously.

Example of a Successful Letter

Focus on the opening

██████████ is a scholar in the making. He reads critically and closely, generalizes with strong evidence, reasoning, and judgement, and writes precisely. In a seminar, ██████████ attends to the discourse in a class with considerable diligence and sensitivity. I am more than confident that he will distinguish himself at any college or university lucky enough to enroll him. I urge you to consider his candidacy most seriously.

This is the second sentence of the letter.

Example of a Successful Letter

Tell A Specific Story

I first met ██████ in my junior English elective, “America as Literature.” I was impressed from the start with the way that ██████ could identify and trace motifs in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He has an eye for detail and an ability to link patterns and to develop insights about complex literature. These abilities will, no doubt, transfer to other domains and disciplines. Indeed, he demonstrated just such transfer when he drafted and revised his “I-Search” essay last spring. This paper is designed to have students pursue a topic of genuine interest to them and then to develop it into an evidence-based and well-reasoned persuasive essay. His topic -- the increased use of psychotropic drugs that claim to enhance cognition -- was terrific. He not only identified the problem of their increased use; he also pushed this argument to say that psychotropic drugs fuel Americans’ “obsession with individual achievement and success.” At the end of the project, he presented a genuinely integrated argument that blended hard and social sciences -- and all with the rhetorical precision he developed as a student of English.

Example of a Successful Letter

Tell A Specific Story

I first met ██████ in my junior English elective, “America as Literature.” I was impressed from the start with the way that ██████ could identify and trace motifs in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He has an eye for detail and an ability to link patterns and to develop insights about complex literature. These abilities will, no doubt, transfer to other domains and disciplines. Indeed, he demonstrated just such transfer when he drafted and revised his “I-Search” essay last spring. This paper is designed to have students pursue a topic of genuine interest to them and then to develop it into an evidence-based and well-reasoned persuasive essay. His topic -- the increased use of psychotropic drugs that claim to enhance cognition -- was terrific. He not only identified the problem of their increased use; he also pushed this argument to say that psychotropic drugs fuel Americans’ “obsession with individual achievement and success.” At the end of the project, he presented a genuinely integrated argument that blended hard and social sciences -- and all with the rhetorical precision he developed as a student of English.

Example of a Successful Letter

Finish with the “essence”

■■■■■ listens to understand and can pause and reflect on others’ thinking and points of view. These relational qualities make him an outstanding participant in discussion at the same time that they create a safe and creative atmosphere for others. I am truly grateful for his presence in our class. I hope this short letter has given you some sense of my deep respect for ■■■■■ . . .

Example of a Successful Letter

Finish with the “essence”

██████ listens to understand and can pause and reflect on others’ thinking and points of view. These relational qualities make him an outstanding participant in discussion at the same time that they create a safe and creative atmosphere for others. I am truly grateful for his presence in our class. I hope this short letter has given you some sense of my deep respect for ██████████ . . .

Your Student: Carsyn B.

- Watch film
- Focus on Carsyn
- Jot notes
 - Headline words?
 - A story?
 - Essence?





Your Turn: Brainstorming the Letter

- ❑ On your own, take about 6 minutes, and use the template to —
 - ❑ Generate a headline that tells the Big Idea of this student
 - ❑ Take notes on the central story you can tell
 - ❑ Brainstorm the “essential”



Assess!

- ❑ In groups of three, share out your notes
- ❑ Use the single-point rubric to assess how prepared you are to write

"Single-Point" Teacher Recommendation Rubric

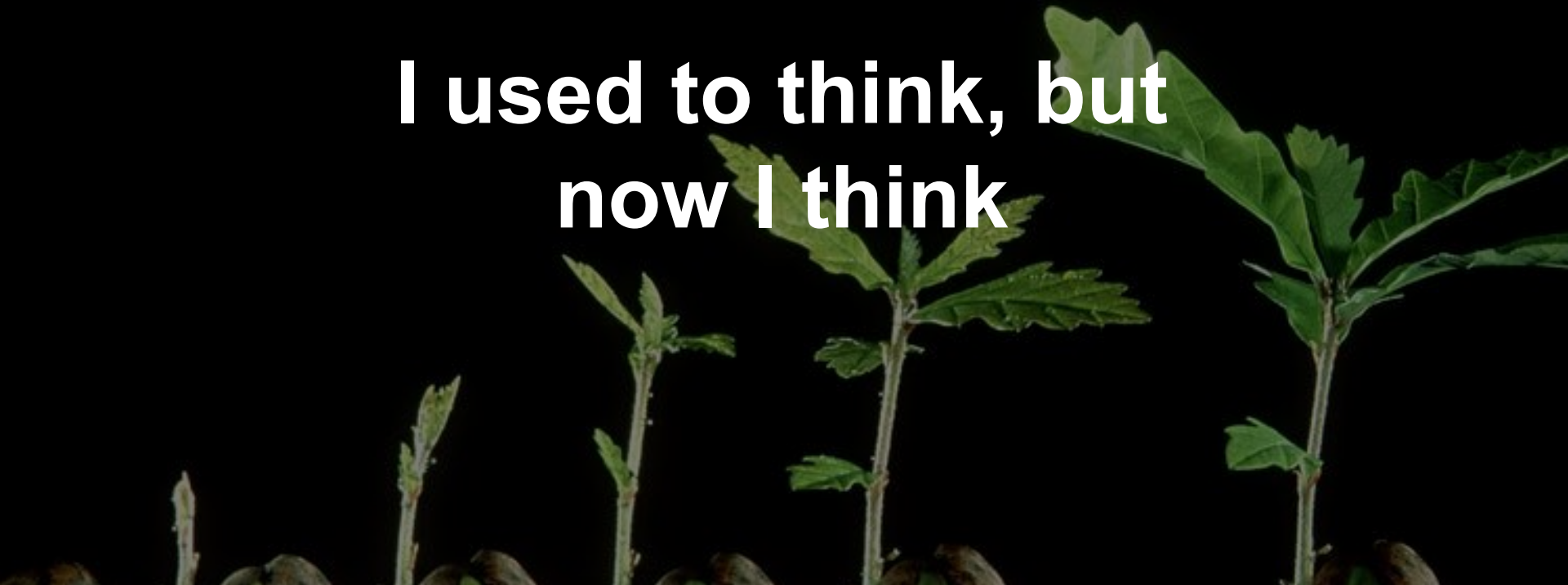
The following rubric describes three essential criteria for a teacher recommendation. While successful letters can be different from what is described below, colleges value these criteria in teacher recommendations.

Do:

- Keep the letter to one page
- Only discuss your experience with the student in class (or in the main environment of your interaction)
- Be positive and truthful

Concerns (areas that need work)	Criteria	Advanced (evidence of exceeding standards)
	<p style="text-align: center;">"The Lede"</p> <p>The "Big Idea" about the student you want to share is clear at the very outset of your letter. The opening sets the reader up for a clear and specific example to follow in the next paragraph.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">"The Evidence"</p> <p>The second paragraph offers a clear, specific story that serves as evidence to support the Big Idea in paragraph 1. It will likely reference a student's way of working, what they add to a class, and what they did "that one time," which makes them memorable and recommendable.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">"The Final Image"</p> <p>This final paragraph describes the essence of the student that you think will bring the most value to a college or university. Can you imagine what they'll bring to a college over the next four years? Offer a thoughtful, if brief, prediction.</p>	

**I used to think, but
now I think**



Thank You