

# Yale Law School

Letters of  
Recommendation  
Tip Sheet

## **Yale Law School Admissions Office**

### **Letters of Recommendation Tip Sheet**

We are thrilled that you are interested in Yale Law School. The guidance below, while not exhaustive, will help you learn more about the characteristics of strong, effective letters of recommendation. Feel free to share this resource with your recommenders!

- **Keep the purpose of letters of recommendation in mind and don't forget the little things** as you gather letters for your application.
  - Remember that the purpose of a letter of recommendation is to help us assess your academic abilities, provide context on your academic program, and provide us with information about who you are as a person and community member.
  - All letters of recommendation must be submitted through LSAC. You will submit a form, which will generate a request to your recommender to submit a letter on your behalf directly to LSAC.
  - You should always waive your right to review your letters of recommendation.
  - Remember that your recommenders are often very busy. Give them lots of lead-time and be as helpful as possible by providing any requested materials.
- **Who should write your letters of recommendation?**
  - At Yale Law School, our readers care deeply about your academic ability and how you will perform as a student. In our view, professors or others who have taught you are most credible when speaking about your academic abilities.
  - Ideally, your recommenders will be people who taught you in rigorous, doctrinal, upper-level courses that utilized skills and abilities similar to those required in law school. It is even better if they taught you in multiple courses or had the opportunity to get to know you in other settings, like office hours or as a supervisor.
  - Someone who directly supervised your research or worked with you one-on-one on a significant paper or project can also be an excellent recommender.
  - Always choose substance over signature! It is far more important for your recommender to know you well than for us to recognize their name.
  - Try to contact former professors even if you have been out of school for a while, and try to maintain those relationships after you graduate.
  - We understand that applicants who have been out of school for a significant period may not be able to get academic letters. If you have professional recommenders, advise them to emphasize your academic abilities and those skills relevant to law school as demonstrated through your work as much as possible.
- **Whom should not write your letters?**
  - Family members, friends, and peers.
  - 'Big name' recommenders with little direct insight into your abilities.
  - Recommenders who seem reluctant to write a letter for you.

- **Letters of recommendation should place primary focus on those skills that are most relevant to your ability to succeed as a law student,** as well as the ways in which you stand apart from your peers.
  - Key skills for law students include analytical abilities, research and writing skills, and overall intellectual strengths.
  - Letters should focus on those areas about which your recommenders have firsthand knowledge.
  - Letters that include details and examples are usually much more effective than letters that rely only on general statements.
  - It can be helpful if your recommenders compare you to other students they have taught either qualitatively or quantitatively (e.g., “one of the top students in my career,” “top 10%”; “a standard of deviation beyond”). It is important for these comparisons to be genuine; not every student can be “the top” student.
  - Strong letters of recommendation are often personal and clearly written specifically for the applicant. Authenticity matters for letters of recommendation just as it does for your written materials.
- **Letters of recommendation should limit discussion of certain topics.** Remember that longer letters are not always stronger.
  - There is no need to provide a detailed description of the course(s) themselves. While these descriptions are fine if brief, they should not be overly long.
  - Letters of recommendation should not provide a detailed discussion of activities that are covered on your resume (e.g., extracurricular activities or work experiences). This is especially true when your recommender does not have any firsthand knowledge of these experiences.
- **Letters of recommendation can be a good place to provide context.**
  - If you received a significant award from your institution, especially one where the recommender was involved in the selection process or one awarded by your recommender’s department, it can be helpful for the recommender to provide some context for the award.
  - If specific courses that you took or programs that you participated in were particularly challenging, your recommender can provide this context. It is far better for your recommender to describe your challenging coursework than for you to discuss this in an addendum.
  - A letter of recommendation can also provide information about who you are as a student and community member. For example, did you show determination in overcoming a bad midterm grade? Did you help facilitate discussion during class? Did you support fellow students who were struggling? Did you serve in a leadership role in the academic department?
- **Use good judgment about how many letters to submit!**
  - We require two letters of recommendation and allow up to four.
  - If submitting more than two, ask yourself whether the additional letters are as strong as the first two are, and whether they are duplicative. Less can be more, and weaker letters can detract from stronger ones.