

Yale Law School

The background of the document is a photograph of a stone archway. The arch is made of light-colored stone with intricate carvings. In the lower right corner, a fountain is visible, with water spraying upwards. The overall tone is warm and academic.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION TIP SHEET

2024-2025

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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!

- **Know your audience!** At Yale Law School, your primary audience is our faculty.
 - Faculty members care deeply about your academic ability and how you will perform as a student in their classrooms.
 - Faculty readers believe that their peers, specifically professors or others who have taught you, are most credible when speaking about your academic abilities.
- **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.
- **Letters of recommendation should limit discussion of certain topics.**
 - There is no need to provide a detailed descriptions of the course(s) themselves. While these descriptions are fine if brief, they should not be overly long.
 - Letters of recommendation should also 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.

- **Whom should you select?**
 - Ideally, your recommender should be someone who has taught you in substantive and/or rigorous courses; even better if they have taught you in multiple courses.
 - Someone who has directly supervised your research or worked with you one-on-one on a significant paper or project can 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've been out of school for a while, and try to maintain those relationships after you graduate.
 - If you must choose professional recommenders, advise them to emphasize your academic abilities as demonstrated through your work if possible.

- **Whom should you avoid?**
 - 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.

- **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.