

Engineering 0011/0711 – Fall, 2009
Writing Assignment #1

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

DUE: In class, Thursday, September 10

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Hand in a hard copy of Letter of Recommendation at the beginning of your Engineering 0011 class on Thursday, September 10. Be sure to attach a copy of the Evaluation Sheet. “Hand in a hard copy . . . at the beginning of your 0011/0711 class” means that you **have your hard copy (with attached evaluation sheet) ready—proofread, printed—when you come to class.** Do not plan on coming to class and then printing out your writing assignments. Do not plan on using class-time to finish up or proofread your writing assignments. Please be sure to attach the Letter of Recommendation Evaluation Sheet to your printed Letter of Recommendation.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION ASSIGNMENT

Your task for this assignment is to write about yourself from the perspective of a college professor who has come to know you over the Fall '09-Spring'10 academic year.

Imagine it is April 2010 and you have just found an engineering-related scholarship for which you are going to apply. One of the requirements of the scholarship application is a **400-450-word** letter of recommendation from one of your university professors. You decide to ask your Engineering Analysis professor (or some other professor with whom you will have had contact over the Fall '09 and Spring '10 semesters) to write this letter of recommendation. In this assignment, you will play the role of the professor and write the letter of recommendation.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

- The letter-writer (the professor) must establish his or her authority and credibility with **relevant specifics** of his or her position in the Swanson School of Engineering and with **relevant specifics** regarding how he or she has come to know enough about the scholarship candidate (you).
- Since the letter is for a scholarship for students completing their first year in an Engineering degree program, the scholarship judges will be looking for **relevant, specific** information about the student's (your) recent pre-college achievements, activities, and experiences and for relevant information about the student's (your) first year Swanson School of Engineering achievements, activities and experiences.
- The scholarship judges will be looking for some statement of the character of the applicant, though claims about the student's (your) character **must be supported by details of the student's (your) achievements, activities and experiences** as a high school and first-year engineering student.
- The scholarship judges do not have the time or inclination to “guess at” why **this student** is an excellent candidate for **this particular** scholarship. A large claim about the student's (your) meriting the scholarship will only hold up if concrete, load-bearing specifics are also present. The letter-writer (the professor) **must clarify** why this student (you) is a particularly appropriate, desirable, worthy scholarship candidate. The student (you) may be a member of the Pitt marching band or the student (you) may have published poetry in a national literary magazine, but are those particular activities or achievements important to a panel that is judging candidates for the UPMC Emerging Leaders in Biotechnology Scholarship? Such achievements **might** be relevant to establishing a student's “good match qualities” for the scholarship, but such a “match” must be clearly articulated. Perhaps the student (you) captained her division-winning soccer team during her senior year in high school. Is that achievement relevant to a judging panel for the Pennsylvania Robotics Consortium's Excellence in Undergraduate Achievement Scholarship? If captaining a soccer team **is** relevant to a student's potential as an excellent Achievement in Robotics scholarship recipient, the letter-writer (the professor) must **clearly describe that relevance.**

ARRANGEMENT OF INFORMATION IN THE LETTER

- The first paragraph of the letter should be the standard opening paragraph of a letter of recommendation. This section should introduce the letter-writer, the scholarship candidate, and the reason for the letter.
- This information **should be followed by 3-4 paragraphs that specify the achievements, experiences, abilities, and qualities that make this student (you) a good candidate for this scholarship.** To establish the student's (your) most important and outstanding qualifications, the letter-writer (the professor) must draw on the **relevant parts** of the student's (your) pre-college experience, as far as the letter-writer is acquainted with these. The letter-writer should draw on true and real information about the student's (your) pre-college activities and experience; the letter-writer must also establish how it is that a college professor might know this information about the student (you).
- The letter-writer (the professor) must also include **relevant details** about the student's (your) first year in the University of Pittsburgh's Swanson School of Engineering. (You will need to imagine what **you will have realistically accomplished** by the end of this, your freshman year.)
- Finally, the letter-writer (the professor) should complete the letter with a paragraph that **reinforces** the reasons for considering this student (you) for this scholarship. Note that this does not mean you will necessarily want to repetitiously sum up all that has come before in the letter. Judges for such scholarships are often swamped by letters; the professor writing this letter will want to leave the judges with something **memorable and specific** about **this** student (you). The professor will want to reinforce the most salient aspects of the student's qualifications, and leave a strong impression, rather than simply rehashing general information or stating bland, obvious clichés.

WHAT KIND OF SCHOLARSHIP IS THE STUDENT APPLYING FOR?

- The sponsoring group of the scholarship is up to you; thus you have some freedom to choose particular qualities and experiences the group might be looking for in a potential scholarship recipient. Keep in mind, though, that the scholarship must have something to do with engineers/engineering.
- You might invent a scholarship in a field or discipline that is of particular interest to you. For instance, the scholarship could focus on international students, or students planning to go into bioengineering, or perhaps the sponsoring organization is the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, or General Motors, or Sony, or Apple Computers, or a global chemical manufacturer, or the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership, or a local group of transplant surgeons.

FORMAT AND WORD COUNT REQUIREMENTS

Note: your letter must be formatted exactly as detailed. Formatting errors will lower your grade.

- The letter must be formatted in **Times New Roman, 10 pt. font.**
- All margins must **be 1 inch.**
- All text must be and presented in "full block" format, **with left and right margins justified.**
- Double space **between** paragraphs; **do not indent** paragraphs.
- The **Letter of Recommendation Template shows exactly** where information such as addresses, the greeting and the closing must appear.
- **The body of the letter** (this does not include names and addresses, "greeting" or "closing"/signature) **must be between 400 and 450 words.** 450 words in Times New Roman 10 is equal to about 2/3 of a page. You may exceed this word count by several words, but you must keep your letter to one page (including your signature). If you find you have 525 words, you will need to revise for conciseness, trimming out any unnecessary wordiness or repetitious generalities. On the other hand, if you think you have finished with the letter and your word-count is 310, you will know that your letter is insufficiently detailed and substantial for this particular writing situation, and you will need to add necessary, relevant detail and explanation.
- Include the word count of the body of your letter at the end of the body of your letter (as shown in the template).

PROOFREADING AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION

- Before submitting this letter (before submitting any writing for any situation), **check your work. THEN CHECK IT AGAIN. CHECK YOUR FORMATTING. CHECK FOR GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, and SPELLING ERRORS. CHECK FOR CLARITY.** Use grammar and spell checkers, but DO NOT rely only on these tools. Spell checkers will not let you know if you have incorrectly used “their” when you meant “there” or “than” when you meant “then.” Grammar checkers are notoriously limited and inaccurate when suggesting problems and changes. Before finalizing and submitting this (or any writing), check your work in HARD COPY at least once and be careful to make any necessary corrections or changes accurately when returning to the screen. It is never a bad idea to CHECK A HARD COPY then again before saving, printing, and submitting your final version.
- For further important details on format and content, consult Letter of Recommendation Template.