

## Reference letters

I am happy to write reference letters for former students, but I expect you to do the preparation.

Please provide me with the following information:

- Who is the reference going to (name, address, institution)
- What is the reference for (program, plan of study, employment)
- Why are you suitable for this?  
Bear in mind that you will have done other things since I last saw you, and I may not be aware of all your accomplishments as a cadet or graduate student. The best way to cover this is to give me a CV or resumé, with bullet points for the accomplishments or attributes that you feel are most appropriate for the reference you are requesting.
- Supporting evidence  
If you are requesting a reference after more than one or two years away from the college, and we have not been in contact about your progress, I would appreciate evidence of the claims of suitability, such as recent writing samples, publications, citations, or contacts who are aware of your accomplishments. Due diligence requires that I check my facts.

If you need the reference at short notice, drafting the key elements yourself will reduce my response time. What you draft won't be the letter I send, but will help me put your request in context. You will find a sample text on the following page, which you should follow. I may add other information based on your student record, my recollections, and supporting evidence you provide.

Be realistic. Half of all students are in the bottom 50 percent of their programs, and not all the references I write are glowingly positive, but I have written strong recommendations for weak students, and marginal recommendations for students with good marks. Admissions committees have good bullshit detectors, and a generic reference letter isn't worth much. I will not send a poor reference without telling you, and I will normally share my reference letter with you, even if it is supposed to be confidential (some exceptions apply).

I take an interest in your continued professional development and well-being, and wish you all the best in your endeavours.

[sample reference letter text follows]

~~~~~ Institutional letterhead from RMC Department of Political Science ~~~~~

Name or  
Admissions Committee  
Institution  
Email or address to which it should be sent

**Re:** [your name, program you are applying for]

2 May 2016

Dear [name, admissions committee, sir or ma'am] (it's a good idea to know who you are writing to)

This reference supports an application for admission to [program, stream, any specific details that indicate I am familiar with your application] by [your name] I have known [your name] since [when did we first meet, or when did you enter RMCC] through my role as [in what capacity did I know you?]

Here I usually add a paragraph to the effect that you read widely, write clearly, and communicate well in however many languages you speak. Not everyone does. Sometimes the best I can say is that complete work conscientiously and usually edit carefully. If your reading and writing skills are marginal, you need to emphasize other things that you bring to the program.

[your name] is suitable for the [program, employment, internship, etc] because ... (explain why the program is right for you and why you are right for this particular program. Keep it simple and honest. If were a poor student, what has changed?)

This [program, employment, internship, etc] fits into their long term goals because \_\_\_\_\_ (a program is not an end in itself; I can make the case for you more strongly if you tell me why this is an important part of your plan)

What may set [your name] apart from your other applicants is .... (what makes you special, and why should I recommend you?)

If I can be of any assistance in the deliberations of the Admissions Committee, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

My signature block