

Subject: Academic letter of recommendation for law school information

Dear Recommender:

The USC Dornsife Career Pathways Pre-law and Graduate School Advising team would like to thank you in advance for supporting our pre-law students. A strong letter of recommendation can be the deciding factor in a candidate's law school admission journey.

Most law schools prefer that candidates use the Law School Admission Council's Credential Assembly Service (CAS) to collect and disperse letters of recommendation. The general process stands that a recommender submits one letter through a unique link sent by CAS. When the candidate is ready to apply, CAS sends copies of that letter to all schools the student is applying to. A handful of schools still prefer that the letters of recommendation come to the school directly from the recommenders. That is increasingly rare, and it is the candidate's responsibility to tell the recommender exactly where the letters should go and to provide proper envelopes and postage.

Most law schools operate on a "rolling admissions" basis, whereby they start reviewing applications and potentially extend offers of admission as early as late October. Applying early gives candidates a distinct advantage, therefore, we encourage candidates to apply as early as possible in the process.

Please be frank with candidates about your timeline for writing and submitting your letter of recommendation so they know what to expect and how to follow up if needed. If a candidate applies to law schools early, but a recommender sends the requested recommendation later in the admissions cycle there are two possible scenarios. In one scenario, the candidate's file remains stagnant until the recommendation letter is received, costing the candidate any benefit they may have received from an early application. In the other scenario, the candidate's application is reviewed and a decision is made without benefit of the recommendation. Please help the candidate develop realistic expectations by sharing the time you feel you need to produce and submit the letter into CAS.

If you do not feel able to provide a strong recommendation, please let the candidate know to help give them enough time to request a letter of recommendation elsewhere.

We greatly appreciate you taking the time and energy to reflect on this candidate's qualifications for law school and write a letter of recommendation. If needed, the next page shares a few insights related to writing recommendation letters. If there is anything we can do to make the recommendation letter writing process easier or more efficient, please let us know.

Best regards,

Pre-Law and Graduate School Advising Team
Dornsife Career Pathways



INSIGHTS REGARDING WRITING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR LAW SCHOOL

- If the candidate has not already provided you with their resume, unofficial transcript, and a reasonably developed draft of their law school personal statement, feel free to ask for them if useful to you in the writing process.
- In your recommendation letter, highlight skills law schools are particularly interested in:
 - Critical thinking
 - Logical analysis
 - Ability to read and understand large quantities of complex written information
 - Writing
 - Oral communication
 - Research
- Provide concrete examples to illustrate how the candidate exhibited those skills in your class.
- Explain the content of the course(s) and its value, and explain the candidate's firm grasp of that content.
- Mention in detail any significant work the candidate did in your class. For example, "Mary wrote a 25-page term paper exploring the relevance of Sun Tzu's book The Art of War to the 21st century."
- If you can, compare the candidate favorably to his/her peers. For example, "Ms. Jones' work stood out in her class of forty honor students and I consider her to be among the top 5% of all students I've encountered in my 13 years of teaching."
- If the course is part of an honors program, mention that and discuss the criteria for participation.
- If the candidate's major only accepts a small number of applicants, or if the major (or course) has a low grading curve which makes the grades appear artificially low, explain those circumstances in some detail to give the admissions committee context.
- If you know that the candidate has a particularly strong knowledge base in some of the content areas applicable to law students and lawyers, mention that. Those areas include, but are not limited to: U.S and international history and political systems, social justice, western philosophy, political theory, economics, accounting, psychology, rhetoric.
- Do not hesitate to share details which might help the law school admissions committees gain quality insights into the candidate's character, aptitude, and potential success for a law-related career.