

# GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A LETTER OF REFERENCE

## CASCADE CAREER CENTER, PORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### **Positive & Honest**

Write a letter you would like to have written about you. Blending positivism with honesty may sound like an oxymoron but it is not. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Be honest in your critique but realize this letter can greatly help or hinder an individual's career. Employers will be able to read between the lines for information you did not say, so you are not obligated to describe at length a person's shortcomings. Focus your letter on their strengths, skills potential and personality traits.

### **Know the Person**

People who really know the individual about whom they are writing write the best letters. Before writing the letter ask your requester questions about his or her future plans: request a resume or a verbal account of work history and non-work activities. This will help you see the whole person and assist you in writing a thoughtful and thorough letter.

### **What to Say**

Ask... What three things would you like me to mention in the letter?

Ask... What do you feel have been your best experiences here?

Ask... What do you think you have learned?

Ask... What specific skill sets should be highlighted?

Have the requester write an outline of the tasks involved in the work experience. This will serve as a memory jog, and point out skills you might have overlooked.

### **Sample Sentences**

1. John Doe has demonstrated organizational and leadership skills, rarely observed in an individual beginning a career in\_\_\_\_\_.
2. The staff has come to look upon Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ as an integral part of the team; she has effective suggestions and is professional in all accounts.
3. His work is completed with efficiency and in a timely manner. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ always approaches new tasks with a positive attitude.
4. Terry has shown progress during her tenure at our company. She became confident and used techniques to gain and maintain client's interest. She has a very proactive approach and works hard to positively represent herself and the company.
5. Sandra seeks and is receptive to suggestions: her efforts for improvement are easily recognized.
6. He/She has been a pleasure to work with and will benefit any future employer.
7. She is clearly an outstanding candidate for a position that allows advancement and increasing responsibilities.
8. It is without hesitation that I recommend....

### **Guidelines for Writing Recommendations**

- If you feel you cannot give a neutral or positive recommendation, do not agree to the candidate's request.
- Letters should be neatly formatted and typed.
- Address letters to "To Whom It May Concern" if you cannot personalize it.
- State how long you have known the candidate and in what capacity you have observed his/her performance, include relevant aspects of the environment in which you observed the candidate.
- Be factual, sincere and skills focused. Avoid vague statements or giving information that is "second hand" "personal" or outside your observation or knowledge of the candidate.
- If you make subjective statements or give opinions, clearly identify them as such.
- **Do not include information that will or may indicate the applicant's race, religion, age, national origin, marital status, disability or citizenship status.** If you are not sure about whether you should mention something relating to the candidate's personal life or character that is not related to addressing his/her skills, it is best not to mention it.