



Counselor Recommendation Letter Builder

Complete this builder before you start writing. You don't need to cover everything.. the counselor letter is just part of the application. It is not your responsibility to summarize their entire four years of high school. Find 2–3 things that make this student distinctive that you can contribute.

1. What Do I Want the Reader to Know?

In 2–3 words, this student is:

What will I remember most about this student?

What can I tell the reader that isn't already in the application?

2. Find a Moment (or more)

Think about something you **personally saw or experienced**:

- A memorable conversation
- How they handled disappointment
- A course-registration decision
- An interaction with another student
- A time they surprised me
- A moment when I noticed growth
- Something small they do that says a lot about them

This is your anecdote. Use the moment instead of simply calling the student kind, mature, resilient, etc.

What happened?

What does it show about the student?



3. Find the Academic Story

Don't summarize the transcript. What does it not show?

For example, maybe the student:

- Chose significant academic challenge
- Showed meaningful growth
- Rebounded from difficulty
- Pursued an interest deeply
- Made a revealing course choice
- Faced course/scheduling limitations
- Record needs additional context
- Transcript speaks for itself

The one academic point worth making:

Specific evidence or example:

4. Add Context

What might the reader misunderstand or undervalue without my explanation?

Useful ways to add context:

“This represents one of the most demanding schedules available...”

“She is one of only ____ students in her class who...”

“Because our school does not offer _____, he...”

“What may not be obvious from the transcript is...”

No useful additional context? Don't force it if it isn't going to help the reader.



Build the Letter

Option 1: Traditional Letter

Opening — Who is this student?

I have come to know _____ as someone who...

What stands out most to me about _____ is...

Use the **2–3 qualities** you identified above.

Academic — What doesn't the transcript show?

_____ 's transcript shows _____, but it does not fully capture...

One decision that captures _____ 's approach to academics was...

Add context if needed.

Personal — Show the reader

Use your anecdote:

What happened → What did the student do → What does it reveal?

Closing — Look forward

I expect _____ to bring the same _____ to a college community.

I recommend _____ with _____.



Option 2: Paragraph + Bullets

Opening:

I have known [Name] for [Time] and have come to know them as _____, _____, and _____.

Choose Your Sections

Choose **2–4 sections where you can provide unique insight**. You do not need to use the same sections for all.

- **Academic Overview:** Rigor, trajectory, course choices, intellectual interests, or approach to challenge.
- **School Context:** Course availability, scheduling, grading, opportunities, unique circumstances, school policies that affected this student, or other context needed to understand the record.
- **Areas of Impact:** How the student has made a difference in your school or community.
- **Personal Qualities:** Qualities you have personally observed, supported by a specific example.
- **Growth & Development:** Meaningful academic, personal, or social growth.
- **Leadership:** How the student leads. Not just the titles they hold.
- **Response to Challenge:** How the student handled difficulty, disappointment, or a setback.
- **Community Contribution:** The role the student plays in your school and relationships with others.

Other options: Intellectual Curiosity • Independence & Initiative • Outside Responsibilities • Relationships with Others • Looking Ahead

Closing:

I expect _____ to bring _____ to a college community, and I recommend them _____.

Quick Synonym List

Hardworking → persistent • disciplined • self-directed • consistent

Kind → attentive • empathetic • inclusive • thoughtful

Smart → curious • analytical • insightful • intellectually adventurous

Leader → trusted • collaborative • influential • brings others along

Mature → accountable • independent • reflective • self-aware

**** Regardless of which category or word you choose, prove it with an example.**