

The recommendation letter

For teachers, principals and employers writing for an Afghan student applying abroad. Three templates and a brag sheet.

د سپارښتنې لیک · توصیه نامه — لارښود د ښوونکو لپاره

Give this to your teacher four weeks before the deadline.

Ariana Nexus Academy translates letters written in Pashto or Dari for its students.

04

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Complimentary for Ariana Nexus Academy students

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Writing a recommendation letter that a foreign university will actually use

For teachers, principals, professors and employers. Most Afghan letters are declined not because the student is weak, but because the letter is written in a form the reader cannot score. This document fixes that in about twenty minutes.

FOR THE STUDENT HANDING THIS OVER

Give this document to your teacher at least four weeks before the deadline, with the brag sheet on page 6 already filled in.

Your teacher may write in Pashto or Dari. Ariana Nexus Academy translates and certifies the letter for its students. Do not ask a teacher to write in English if their English is not strong — a weak English letter damages you more than a strong Dari one.

Never write the letter yourself for a teacher to sign. Admissions offices detect it, and at several universities it ends the application permanently.

Why Afghan letters are often discounted

WHAT THE LETTER USUALLY CONTAINS

Formal praise: excellent moral character, disciplined, respectful, obedient

General claims with no comparison

The student's grades, repeated

Religious or family endorsement

WHAT THE READER NEEDS INSTEAD

Specific, dated evidence: what the student did, in your class, that other students did not

Comparison: "the strongest of roughly 240 students I have taught in nine years"

Grades are already in the file. Tell the reader what the grades do not show.

Academic and intellectual evidence. Character is shown through an incident, not asserted.

WHAT THE LETTER USUALLY CONTAINS

WHAT THE READER NEEDS INSTEAD

One paragraph	Three-quarters of a page to a page and a half. Shorter reads as a favour; longer reads as padding.
No contact details	Your full name, exact title, institution, official email and phone. Letters from unverifiable writers are discarded.

The structure

SECTION	LENGTH	CONTENTS
1 · Context	2–3 sentences	Who you are, your exact position, how long and in what capacity you have known the student, and how many students you teach or supervise in a year.
2 · The comparison	1–2 sentences	Where this student stands among the students you have taught. Be honest. "Top five percent" from a teacher of 240 is worth more than "the best I have ever seen" from a teacher of twelve.
3 · Evidence one	One paragraph	A specific incident with a date, a task and an outcome. Something they did, not something they are.
4 · Evidence two	One paragraph	A second incident showing a different quality — preferably one that shows how they behave when something goes wrong.
5 · Character	One short paragraph	How they treat other students, what they do when they are not being watched. One example, not a list of virtues.
6 · The recommendation	2–3 sentences	A clear, unhedged statement of support and what you believe they will do with the opportunity. Then your name, title, institution, email, phone.

TEMPLATE ONE

The school teacher's letter

For a subject teacher writing for an undergraduate application.

Replace everything in brackets. Keep the shape. On school letterhead where possible.

[Date]

To the Admissions Committee, [University name]

I am [full name], [exact title, e.g. Teacher of Mathematics] at [school], [city], Afghanistan, where I have taught for [number] years. I teach approximately [number] students each year. I taught [student name] mathematics in grades [x] and [y], and supervised [his/her] work on [something specific].

Of the roughly [number] students I have taught in [number] years, [student] is among the strongest [three / five / ten] I can name.

[Incident one. A date, a task, and what happened. Example: "In the autumn term of 2024 I set the class an optional problem on modular arithmetic that I did not expect anyone to complete.

She returned three days later with two solutions, one of which used an approach I had not taught and had to check myself. She then spent two lunch periods explaining it to four classmates."]

[Incident two, showing something different — how the student behaves under difficulty, in a group, or after failing at something. Example: "When she failed the December physics test — the only failure in her record — she came to ask what she had misunderstood rather than what the mark would do to her average. She re-sat the material in January without being asked and scored 92."]

[Character, through one example. How the student treats others; what they do when nobody is assessing them.]

I recommend [student] to you without reservation. [One sentence on what you believe they will do with the opportunity.] I am available to answer any question about this letter.

[Signature]

[Full name] · [Exact title] · [School] · [Official email] · [Phone with country code]

Template two — the principal or head teacher

Use this when the university asks for a counselor or school-official letter, or when the student needs a letter confirming school context. It does a different job: it explains the school, so the student's record can be read correctly.

I am [name], [title] of [school], [city]. The school enrolls approximately [number] students; [number] completed grade 12 in [year]. We offer [subjects]; we do not offer [Advanced Placement / International Baccalaureate / laboratory sciences / etc.], and our students therefore have no access to [x].

[Student] graduated [rank] of [number] in the class of [year], with an average of [x] / 100. Our grading scale is [explain: what a 90 means, what proportion of students reach it]. [Student] achieved [Kankor score] in the [year] national entrance examination, which placed [him/her] approximately [rank] nationally among [number] candidates.

[One paragraph of context the reader needs: interruptions to schooling, the year the school was closed, what teaching was available during that period, and what the student did in that time.]

[One paragraph on the student, with one specific example.]

I recommend [student] warmly. [Contact details as above.]

Template three — the employer or supervisor

For graduate applications and scholarships, a work reference is often required and is scored on evidence of responsibility.

I am [name], [title] at [organization]. I supervised [name] directly from [month year] to [month year] in the role of [title], in which [he/she] was responsible for [scope: number of people, budget, sites, cases, files].

[Incident one: a piece of work, its scale, and its outcome, with numbers. What did this person do that a competent colleague would not have?]

[Incident two: judgement under pressure, or a mistake handled well. Employers who describe a mistake honestly are believed about everything else.]

[Where this person ranks among people you have supervised at that level.]

I recommend [name] for [program / scholarship] without hesitation, and would re-employ [him/her] immediately. [Contact details.]

SECTION THREE

The brag sheet

The student fills this in and gives it to the teacher. The teacher writes from it.

A teacher who has taught you for two years still cannot remember the specific things a committee needs. Filling this in is not arrogance; it is the difference between a usable letter and a general one.

1 · WHAT I AM APPLYING FOR

[Program, university, country, deadline date, and how the letter must be submitted — portal link, email, or sealed envelope.]

2 · WHAT I WANT THIS LETTER TO PROVE

[One sentence. Every letter should carry one main claim. Do not ask three teachers to prove the same thing.]

3 · THREE SPECIFIC THINGS I DID IN YOUR CLASS

[With dates. Include at least one thing that went wrong and what I did about it.]

4 · SOMETHING I DID THAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT

[Tutoring, a project, work outside school, responsibility at home.]

5 · MY MARKS IN YOUR SUBJECT, AND MY CLASS RANK IF YOU KNOW IT

6 · THE WEAKNESS I WOULD RATHER THE LETTER DID NOT HIDE

[Committees trust a letter that names one real limitation. Choose which one.]

7 · DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION DETAILS

[Date, portal, email address, and whether the letter must be on letterhead or stamped.]

Practical rules

ITEM	STANDARD
Letterhead	On the institution's letterhead if one exists. If not, a header with the institution's full name, address, phone and website is acceptable.
Signature	Handwritten and scanned, or a genuine digital signature. A typed name alone weakens it.
Stamp	Afghan institutional stamps are unfamiliar to many readers but never harm. Keep them.
Email address	From the institution's domain where one exists. A personal Gmail is accepted but verified more often.
Language	English preferred. Pashto or Dari with a certified translation attached is fully acceptable — Ariana Nexus Academy provides the translation for its students.
Confidentiality	Most U.S. portals ask the student to waive the right to read the letter. Advise the student to waive it: unwaived letters are discounted.
Submission	Usually a portal link sent to the teacher's email. Check the spam folder. Submit at least five days early — portals fail near deadlines.
How many	Two or three. More is not better; a fourth weak letter lowers the average.

Phrases that help and phrases that harm

AVOID

USE

She is a very good and polite student.

She asks the question the rest of the class has not yet realized they need.

He has excellent moral character.

When a classmate's father died he took over the boy's laboratory duties for six weeks without being asked or telling anyone.

I strongly recommend this student.

Of the 240 students I have taught, I would place her in the top three.

She is hardworking and disciplined.

She rewrote her project three times after I rejected it twice; the third version is the one I now show to other classes.

He deserves this opportunity because of his difficult situation.

He achieved this while teaching himself two grades of curriculum with no school. The achievement is the argument; the circumstance is context.

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