

Best Practices for Reference Writing

Completing a reference form or letter can be intimidating. Most references find themselves wondering how they can adequately highlight the best attributes of the candidate to help them achieve their goals. We have compiled a list of best practices along with helpful examples to consider as you construct your statement.

What is a reference statement?

Your statement's objective is to endorse and reinforce the student's candidacy for this scholarship. It provides an external viewpoint on the student's skills, qualifications, and character, which will help us glean their suitability for the award.

To start, review our [Scholarship Requirements](#)

- o Understanding what type of scholarship/position your candidate is applying for will give you helpful context to begin your statement.

Share the nature and age of your relationship with the candidate

- o Share a little information about yourself, your job title, and what you do
- o A sentence or two about you will provide the reviewer with a better understanding of how this relationship may be special
- o Tell us how long you have known the candidate and in what capacity

Example:

1. As a [job title] at [company name], I have had the pleasure of working closely with candidate's name] for [length of time].
2. I have had the pleasure of knowing [candidate's name] for [length of time] in my capacity as [job title] at [company name], and I am honored to provide this reference letter on their behalf.

Share what you know about the student's goals as it relates to this opportunity

- o Tell us whether the student has spoken with you about this scholarship and what they shared about their overall goals
- o To what extent has the student expressed interest in the scholarship's mission and the type of experiences it hopes to highlight?

Focus on a minimum of three transferrable skills or traits

- o Once you get into the body of your reference statement, you should introduce at least three skills or traits that make the candidate a good selection for the opportunity.
- o Be sure to expand on the skills or traits you mentioned above. Provide supporting examples for each skill or trait listed and try to be as specific and goal oriented as possible.

Example: [Name] is a highly motivated and dedicated individual who consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic and/or a commitment to academic excellence. For example, **[provide a time where the student impressed you with their actions, unique thought/ perspective, or written work]**. [Name] is also a skilled communicator and has consistently demonstrated the ability to work collaboratively with others. I recall a time when **[provide an example of a time the student helped others, and/or collaborated efficiently with a team for an overall goal, and/or exemplified great communication under challenging or unique circumstances.]**

Include strong enthusiastic language

Example: "It's my absolute pleasure to recommend [Name] for [the Steinbright Partner's Program Scholarship]."

Avoid letters of reference that:

- Do not provide specific examples and are vague or general in nature.
- Simply repeat the content from the bullet points found on the student's resume, without offering larger context and substance.
- Do not outline the student's accomplishments, strengths, character traits, abilities, goals, and what makes them deserving of the Steinbright Partners Program financial support.
- Include criticism or reservations of the student. If you believe you cannot support the student via a reference, please decline to serve as a reference.
- Support only the basic and foundational expectations of the position or experience.
- Focus solely on your relationship with the student. We certainly would like to learn of your relationship (i.e., personal, academic, or professional employment) within two to three sentences maximum.
- Could be seen or interpreted as legally/ethically questionable (link to the legal/ethical considerations page?).
- Contain misspellings, especially of the student's name. If the student uses more than one name, or uses a nickname that you plan to mention, please introduce it within the reference letter.
- Contain endorsements that are unsubstantiated, contain excessive or minimal praise and are irrelevant.