WRITING & EVALUATING RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

A. Identifying eligible students
   a. GPA>3.75
   b. Unique qualifications, e.g. research, study abroad
   c. Encourage students to form relationships with faculty

B. Mentoring exceptional students
   a. Substantive experiences
   b. Publications
   c. Conference / Presentations

1. Decline writing recommendation
   a. Can't write positive rec.
   b. Don't know student well

2. Preparation / Request the following:
   a. Application
   b. Resume
   c. Deadline
   d. Essays
   e. Interview, particularly for long term goals

3. Format
   a. 1-2 pages
   b. Letterhead vs Form / Consistency
   c. Confidentiality
   d. Balanced "team" of letter writers

4. Details
   a. How long, what capacity know student (so reviewer knows accuracy of detail)
   b. Best among xx students / Top xx %
   c. Should verify applicant information, especially awards, publications, etc.
   d. Expand on info in resume
      i. document activity
      ii. GPA
   e. Provide examples and evidence
      i. Qualitative and Quantitative
      ii. Concrete / Specific
      iii. Results / Impact
      iv. Validate personal statement (may want to critique statement)
      v. Colleagues' attitudes
      vi. Awards

      f.   Striking the "Right Tone" (Schall)
- i. After formal introduction, refer to student by first name
- ii. Narrate a personal interaction
- iii. Recall first impression of student, then contrast with later impression
- iv. Present intriguing asides – spontaneous discussions or shared interests
- v. Describe student's specific contribution to relationship
- vi. Include information about career plans

      g. Attributes – depend on purpose – may be specified in application
- i. Medical school – work independently, organize a complex project, perseverance, flexibility, energetic, integrity, maturity, personality, promise
- ii. Graduate school – motivated, self-directed, ability to complete projects, potential, communication skills
- iii. Employment – motivated, self-directed, confident, conflict management, thorough
- iv. Other – leadership, service

      h. "For more information, please call…" can be interpreted as negative

5. Strategies
   a. Word processing – but *proofread*
   b. Use common paragraphs for same/similar activities
   c. Use active verbs

6. High-stakes awards – require excellent letters of recommendation
   a. Exceptionally strong, written from an informed perspective, and exude a sincere tone.
      - i. Best student in xx years
      - ii. Compared to xx students who have accomplished yy
   b. Uniqueness / what sets student apart
      - i. Undergraduate research
      - ii. Course loads
      - iii. Double major
      - iv. Study abroad
      - v. Internships
   c. Help reviewers know candidate, admire the student
   d. Avoid hyperbole

Writing Recommendation Letters online by Joe Schall https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingrecommendationlettersonline/

https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201101/how-make-recommendations-work-you