Are letters of recommendation really important?

Yes! Most law schools will require at least one letter of recommendation with your application. Law schools have a limited number of slots to fill and there will be a lot of applicants with similar GPAs and LSAT scores vying for those slots. Since law schools typically do not interview candidates, letters of recommendation are an opportunity to provide a picture of the candidate the admissions offices would not get otherwise. A specific, observant and enthusiastic letter from someone who really knows a candidate can be the factor that tips the scale in the candidate’s favor.

What is LSAC’s Letter of Recommendation (LOR) Service?

LSAC’s LOR service is offered as a convenience to Credential Assembly Service (CAS) registrants, recommendation writers, and law schools. A letter discusses the qualities and characteristics of the applicant’s ability, academic and otherwise, to study law. Letters may be submitted electronically or on paper, depending on the recommender’s preference. For a chart that show how law schools have elected to participate in LSAC’s Letters of Recommendation Service, see http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas/services-required-by-law-schools

To view Law School Admission Council information and directions regarding Letters of Recommendation see http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas/lor-evaluations

Who should write my letter of recommendation?

Letters of recommendation should be written by people who really know you, your character, your work ethic and your abilities. Additionally, since your goal is to acquire a positive, persuasive letter, you will want to select someone who writes eloquently and who likes you. Generally, law schools prefer letters of recommendation from your professors, especially if you are coming straight from college. If you have been out of school for some time, a letter from an employer, colleague, or client will be fine.

Admissions committees read these letters to learn:

• how well the writer knows the applicant and the applicant’s academic record
• how the writer describes the applicant’s abilities and characteristics, particularly those that are important for academic success
• the strength of the writer’s support

The letter should begin by introducing the writer and establishing the writer’s qualifications to evaluate the candidate so that the admissions committee will have confidence in the writer’s assessment.

Letters of recommendation should describe how well the writer knows you and contain brief descriptions of the size and number of courses in which the writer has worked with you. It is also a plus if the writer can describe the kinds of formats in which s/he has seen you perform, e.g., written work,
classroom participation, and/or interactions with you outside of class. If the course was especially
challenging, e.g., a graduate level or honors course, the writer should mention that as well.

Be sure to waive your right to see the recommendation letters. Admissions officers place more value
on a recommendation if confidentiality was guaranteed.

What qualities or skills should the letter emphasize?

Make sure the letter really says something about you. Letters of recommendation should be very
specific, and they should provide a picture of the whole person. Did you maintain a high GPA while
holding down a part-time job and volunteering for community service? Make sure that relevant
information is included. The letter should describe all the qualities that make you a good law school
candidate and future lawyer, such as organizational skills and leadership abilities.

Language skills. Legal education and the legal profession stress language mastery. The best law
students are those who have the ability to write and speak with precision, fluency and economy.
Letters of recommendation should discuss how clearly and cogently you communicate your thoughts,
your ability to read and listen for fine points and subtle distinctions.

Analytical capabilities. A letter of recommendation should discuss your analytical capabilities. Legal
education requires well developed analytical skills and the ability to juggle multiple variables. Students
must be able to think independently, be proficient at distinguishing the relevant from the immaterial,
and be capable of cutting through to the essentials. Law students should also be able to handle
ambiguity, recognize exceptions and qualifications which may modify general rules, and be creative
problem-solvers.

Personal qualities. The law school environment consists of large classes, competitive pressure, and
substantial amounts of material to be absorbed. Students who are intellectually inquisitive and who
enjoy engaging in discussion in and outside of class are more likely to flourish in this atmosphere. A
student must be diligent and well organized to handle large quantities of material. Maturity, self-
discipline, motivation, and leadership abilities also help a student navigate through law school.

Specificity. Perhaps the most difficult task in reading a letter of recommendation is interpreting the
significance of such statements as "excellent" and "outstanding." Therefore, the letter should be very
specific. It should illustrate general claims with edifying examples and quantify when possible. For
example, rather than saying that the candidate is "an excellent student," it is much more effective to
say that the candidate is "in the top three percent of all the students I have taught in my academic
career." A favorable comparison of the applicant with other graduates from the law school who are
known to the writer can also provide convincing evidence of the applicant's potential for success.

How can I make my recommender's task easier?

First, read the directions in each law school application so that you will know what is required – and
when! Ask your potential recommender if s/he is willing to write for you, and give the writer plenty of
lead time. At the very least, the writer will need

• the deadline for each application
• points that should be covered (a copy of this FAQ sheet might help)
• your résumé
• your transcript