

WRITING REFERENCE LETTERS FOR GRAD STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITIONS

This template is designed to help you write a support letter that maps onto the Tri-Agency Scholarship evaluation criteria. Additional tips are included at the end of this document.

I. Introductory paragraph

Give a little background. What is the student's role in the program, how do you know them (supervisor, course instructor, etc), and for how long? Consider ranking them relative to other students at the same career stage (e.g., Kermit received a grade of X in my course, and was therefore the top student in my class; Beaker is the most innovative and independent PhD student I have interacted with in my 20-year career at Western). Show enthusiasm here if you think the student deserves the award, and use strong adjectives (e.g., "outstanding," "the very best") if the student merits it.

II. Indicators of research ability and potential (2nd, 3rd, etc. paragraphs)

In this section, you should reference the following:

- Relevant background and current training
- Research experience and achievements relative to the applicant's stage of study
- Quality of contributions and extent to which they advance the field
- Demonstration of sound judgment and ability to think critically
- Enthusiasm for research, originality, initiative, autonomy
- The ability or potential to communicate theoretical, technical and/or scientific concepts clearly and logically in written and oral formats
- Quality of research proposal (esp. significance and expected impact)

III. Relevant experience and achievements (both in academia and other contexts; 4th, 5th etc. paragraphs)

In this section, please touch upon:

- Scholarships, awards, and distinctions (amount, duration and prestige)
- Academic record
- Professional, academic and extracurricular activities as well as collaborations with supervisors, colleagues, peers, students and members of the community, such as:
 - teaching, mentoring, supervising and/or coaching
 - managing projects
 - participating in science and/or research promotion
 - community outreach, volunteer work and/or civic engagement
 - chairing committees, organizing conferences and meetings, participating in university organizations, associations, clubs, etc.

IV. Concluding statement

Here is your chance to summarize what stands out to you regarding this student and to emphasize how much you support their application. Be effusive if you think the student deserves the award; tepid letters and those that are merely descriptive will have a negative impact on the application.

General Tips

This has already been noted, but if you want a student to be competitive, make it clear that you support them. Be effusive. Letters that are vague or primarily descriptive are interpreted as low support for an application. Assuming that is not your goal, sing the applicant's praises.

Scholarships are reviewed by committee members from diverse fields. For this reason, contextualize the student's accomplishments for those unfamiliar with norms for your subdiscipline of psychology. For example, students with publications and conference papers **explain how their record compares to that of their peers**. For example, "Animal's first-authored article in *J of Fancy Schmancy Science* is impressive given the high impact factor of this outlet for my field (5.75). "As an MSc 2 student, it is impressive that Gonzo is developing a manuscript for publication while also presenting his work at international conferences."

Back up your description of the student with specific examples. How is this student ambitious, creative, industrious, a "quick study," etc.?

Avoid gender bias in your letters. This is especially pertinent in our department given that the majority of our students are female. We want them to succeed.

I cannot vouch for the science behind this calculator, but it's interesting to test-drive:

<http://slowe.github.io/genderbias/>