



Helpful Teacher Recommendations: What are US Colleges Looking For?

We have prepared this handout of actual Teacher Recommendations from secondary schools in the UK (with names changed for anonymity) in order to provide some guidance to teachers and administrators. Because the university admissions processes in the US and the UK are markedly different, we have received requests for some sample letters and tips for writing them and hope they will be helpful.

In the admissions process at selective US universities like Harvard, we seek to learn more about the student than just his or her scores and grades. Academic accomplishment is important, but the Admissions Committee also considers many other criteria such as community involvement, leadership and distinction in extracurricular activities, and work experience. We rely on teachers, counselors, headmasters, and alumni/ae to share information with us about each applicant's strength of character, ability to overcome adversity, and other personal qualities – all of which play a part in the Admissions Committee's decisions. Your insights into the student's academic and personal strengths and weaknesses can be very helpful to us in making those decisions.

Some additional tips:

- * Rather than completing each university's individual recommendation form, feel free to write one overall letter for the student and send it to all of the universities, although you should attach it to the individual university's form, if available, and check any appropriate boxes on the form. It may also be a good idea to "pen in" a line or two at the bottom of your letter, addressing yourself to the candidacy of the student to that particular university.
- * The strength of your written evaluation should be consistent with the boxes you have marked to rate the student's overall academic, extracurricular, and personal promise. Does the actual impact of your letter equal your intended impact?
- * It can be helpful if you provide a context within which the student's performance in your class can be evaluated. Give us an idea of the demands of your course, your standards, and how the student compares to others.
- * Be as specific as possible. For example, don't just write, "Sally shows a perceptive understanding of sophisticated literature," but rather tell what her perceptions are about the literature and why that strikes you as noteworthy.
- * Feel free to provide your *personal* insight into a student's academic performance, level of motivation, innate curiosity, and personal qualities. Again, the more specific you can be, the better. Don't hesitate to be anecdotal.
- * Write enough to provide a clear picture of the student, but don't overwrite. Quantity doesn't necessarily mean quality.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #1 - Bart

Bart is a remarkable young man with real ability and potential. He has a passion for understanding the world around him and possesses the skill and expertise to analyse problems critically, and arrive at innovative solutions by making connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. His understanding of Mathematics goes way beyond the requirements of the IB programme and he is able to use his mathematical ability to gain genuine knowledge in Chemistry.

I have known Bart since he arrived at our school two years ago. He won a highly competitive scholarship from his National Committee to study for two years at this international college where we have students from over seventy countries. I taught him Higher Level Chemistry all the time he was a student here. He impressed me immediately with his thirst for knowledge and understanding. Before he arrived he had taught himself much of his prior knowledge about chemistry and when he was here he could often be found with his head in a book reading further around each topic. He does have a good memory for factual information so is easily able to learn supporting facts but his real strength is his understanding and ability to apply underlying principles. He really enjoys questioning assumptions and looking critically at facts and theories that others take for granted. If I have to find a small fault with Bart it is that he is a perfectionist. He never wants to hand in work which he is not entirely comfortable with and this can cause him some problems in meeting deadlines – however, I stress that this is not through any lack of effort but simply because he always feels that he can do it even better. Whenever he was tested he scored very high marks and his top grade of 7 in Chemistry in his final examinations for his IB Diploma was exactly as I predicted.

As part of the requirements for the IB each student must carry out a piece of individual research and write a 4000 word Extended essay. Bart chose to do his in Chemistry. Usually students work on a problem that is new knowledge to them but not to 'mankind'. Bart did some truly original research. The use of microwave ovens in chemistry is well documented but it always involves using an aqueous medium. Bart's research problem was to see whether a microwave oven could be used to determine the dipole moment of molecules other than water. He investigated the effect of microwaves on the members of a homologous series of alcohols and had to overcome considerable practical and theoretical difficulties to establish that there is indeed a relationship and that the method can be used to determine an unknown dipole moment. This was a very successful outcome and his Extended Essay gained the highest mark, and I have included his findings in a recent textbook published by Oxford University Press that I have written.

At our school considerable emphasis is placed on educating the whole individual, not just on academic excellence. Bart fitted in extremely well in this international environment. He has a caring and sensitive nature and is also extremely patient and tolerant. These attributes were particularly useful when he visited other schools each week and helped younger students with literacy and numeracy. He also helped students of his own age in the local comprehensive school develop their computer skills. Within our own school environment he was the elected student representative for his house on the Staff Student Council and also ran an activity 'Norwegian for beginners' for his fellow students.

I've taught many exceptional students during my 25 year teaching career, all of whom have gone on to study at prestigious universities throughout the world. Bart is up there with the best of them – he has a love of learning and a thirst for knowledge that is all too rare. For him understanding is everything.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #2 - Bart

Bart was a student at [our school] for two years and I was his Mathematics teacher throughout this time. His academic record here makes impressive reading and his final diploma score was a total of 41 points, placing him amongst the top 5% of IB candidates worldwide. A young man of high intellect, Bart would have the potential to study at university level in several subject areas. I am pleased to write in support of his application to continue his studies in the field of Mathematics.

His fascination for this subject had clearly been nurtured in his previous school so he came with strong background knowledge. Both his algebraic skills and ability to present mathematical arguments were far in advance of his peers. In addition to this he was very interested in recreational mathematics and enjoyed trying to solve problems that ranged through many branches of the subject. He was quite accustomed to reading textbooks that went well beyond the syllabus and he made full use of the internet to seek out new material. From the outset he excelled in this class and of course gained a top grade in the final examination.

A handful of our best Mathematicians each year take Further Mathematics in addition to their six subject Diploma. This subject was an obvious choice for Bart but there were timetabling problems because of his other subjects so he chose to take the Further Mathematics course by distance learning. This meant reading and taking notes in his personal study time and keeping pace with the material we were covering in lessons. Few students have managed this successfully over the two years but Bart did so and gained a grade 6 in the final exam.

It will be clear that Bart is very gifted in Mathematics but he is quite an exceptional young man with a deep interest in the connections between subject areas. He was really eager to learn as much as he could about the applications of mathematics and one of the great joys of his time here was spending time in animated discussions about this with likeminded friends. Bart's intellectual interests were by no means restricted to Science and Maths. He was able to pursue his interest in Middle Eastern affairs through Peace and Conflict Studies and by studying Arabic Language and visiting Jordan in his second year. He also enjoys music, plays the saxophone and was a valuable member of the Choir on their tour to Portugal.

As part of his community service here he spent time in local schools. His role ranged from helping with the very youngest children in infant classes to assisting with mathematics teaching to final year students in secondary schools. Since leaving the school I understand he has been learning Chinese while being involved in a humanitarian project associated with a Chinese university.

With this breadth of interest and experience he will have much to contribute to the undergraduate community he joins. I see him as a person who does nothing by half measures. He has come a long way from being somewhat shy and socially awkward. He made the most of every opportunity he was given and has developed tremendously.

I confidently commend him as a young man of considerable potential.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #3 - Sophia

I have taught Sophia for both the AS and A2 components of the post-16 Chemistry course and she has proved to be an outstanding all-round scholar. She is an intellectually curious pupil who very carefully thinks through new ideas before asking highly perceptive and nuanced questions which cut to the very heart of the subject matter being discussed. She is a very rewarding person to teach, particularly for the look of delight on her face when she links a new concept into her already impressive framework of knowledge. Her written work is distinctive for its logical presentation of ideas. Practical work is undertaken with calm efficiency and her mathematical skills are equal to any challenge posed.

As a scientist, Sophia offers that rare combination of bringing a rational, highly analytical approach coupled with a refreshingly creative streak. Her interest in her subjects extends far beyond the examination of syllabuses; we often have chats before and after lessons about the latest science book or article she is reading. One of these conversations particularly sticks in mind. Sophia had been reading some works of Steven Pinker on evolutionary psychology and I was extremely impressed by the insight she gained into this subject and the sophistication of the questions she was asking. Ultimately, she went on to write an extended essay on the evolution of the brain, mirror neurons and development of the human mind which won one of the school's prestigious prizes for intellectual excellence.

Sophia will prove a most valuable asset in aspects of university life while rising to, indeed relishing, the academic challenges offered. I can recommend her to you without reservation.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #4 - Sophia

The quirks of school timetabling being what they are, I found myself in the happy position of teaching Sophia English at both the intermediary and senior stages of her school career – in other words for the major public examinations of General Certificate of Secondary Education and Advanced Level. These, by the way, are each two year courses. From the very first day she was an extraordinarily responsive, appreciative and conscientious student, and I could see that her qualities were complemented by outstanding ability and scholarship. Sophia also proved, in the course of time, to be a remarkably friendly and gregarious person – the sort of person with whom one can easily strike up a conversation outside the classroom.

I have always admired her independent approach to learning. This goes far beyond her simply doing things “her way” and suggests, rather, a readiness to take full responsibility for her own progress. At the same time she will always listen to, and act on, advice. Yet Sophia does not expect material to be pre-packaged or spoon fed, and takes it for granted that she will carry out her own preparation and research. In this respect she has the stamina and the interest to read widely and then go on to process copious material from many sources. She has a shrewd sense of what is relevant, and yet is able to convey richness and depth. Her secret here is to write a good essay and express herself with commendable fluency. Over the years she has made a point of developing a well-honed and elegant written style. Being very well disciplined and well organized, she always delivers these essays on time. She possesses both scholarly and moral integrity.

Sophia has many qualities specific to my own subject of English Literature. I particularly admire the way she combines a trained intelligence with refreshing spontaneity, and critical acumen with deep emotional engagement. I like too her sense of both comic and tragic experience, her sense of laughter and pathos, and her belief that lessons themselves can sometimes be “fun” and sometimes in dead earnest. It was a pleasure to introduce her to the deeply moving text of *Death of a Salesman* when she was fifteen. Just a year or so later, I valued her delights in the brittle sophistication of Pope’s apparently frivolous *Rape of the Lock*. She also engaged with the broad sweep of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* and appreciated its exotic descriptions, colonial context and spiritual depth. This year I find myself teaching Sophia *Hamlet*, and as I write she is appreciating the angst of early seventeenth century Melancholy. A colleague, equally fortunate, is introducing her to *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tender is the Night*. I am also aware that she has tackled advanced philosophical and theological concepts in her Religious Studies courses, and has worked specifically on the relationship between mind, body and soul. This is the kind of topic perfectly tailored to Sophia’s manifest strengths in both the Arts and the Sciences. The long and brilliant paper on the Brain that very recently won her a prestigious and coveted prize at this school is still further evidence. She is a scientist with a deep love of literature and culture, and my firm feeling is that she would be particularly in tune, sympathetically and intellectually, with the liberal values and breadth of the American system.

Sophia is indeed a student of many talents whose superb time-management allows her to be active in so many areas on and off campus. She is a keen debater, an impressive mover and shaker, a violinist and a guitarist, a rower and fencer; she is also the founder, no less, of our very own and very popular Dance Society. She would indeed make many excellent contributions to campus life. It is not often that such a natural, friendly and ebullient personality joins forces with an intellect of such versatility and quality. Sophia is a very special student whom we are happy to recommend at the very highest level.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #5 - Harry

It gives me great pleasure to write to you about Harry. He is an extraordinary young man in many ways who has performed at a very high level in his varied activities for as long as I have known him – a period of five years. But there is much more to Harry than just achievement; he is a real giver who supports the community in the boarding house in a selfless and caring manner.

Harry is an intelligent young man who enjoys the cut and thrust of lively classroom discussion and writes confidently. He is also blessed with high levels of motivation and determination: this potent mix of attributes resulted in his excellent GCSE results and enables us confidently to predict him top grades for his A levels.

Harry has always maintained a hectic extracurricular programme, but I have never known this to get in the way of his academic work, or his duties in the boarding house. His coach has written about his rowing, which has clearly been a major factor in his life, but the time this takes out has never prevented him looking for new avenues to explore. As an editor of the school monthly newspaper he has been an important part of the team, working to tight deadlines and often providing copy at the last minute. He has a fine speaking voice, which he used well in reaching the finals of our Declamations competition for three years in a row. He is a valued member of the school debating team. On one memorable occasion he made a speech in Chinese (a language that he has only recently started learning) to hundreds of people when on a visit to a school in Beijing. He has participated fully in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme, attaining his silver and gold medals. These awards involve both challenging expeditions over four days and a large amount of charitable work. He received a Millennium award for undertaking more than 200 hours of community service. In the last holiday, Harry took part in a five week expedition to Costa Rica with a humanitarian organization. Most of the men and women on the trip were two or three years older than him, but he showed maturity beyond his years in leading his group on several occasions and learning to cope with some difficult, and sometimes treacherous, conditions. He recently gave an excellent power-point presentation of the trip in front of the boarding house.

Harry's role in the House has mainly revolved around his prefectorial duties where he sets the highest standards. He is also a 'Mentor' to two of the younger boys and here he has shown his warmth and understanding in helping them settle in during their first term or two. He helped to direct our junior play, which involved taking rehearsals on his own and organising the costumes, lighting and sound: something he did very efficiently and with clear artistic understanding.

Therefore, Harry can be seen as a man of many parts and a master of many. He is totally reliable, always enthusiastic and has an outward looking and mature attitude to life. He is a young man with an outstanding future and I recommend him to you in the warmest possible terms.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #6 - Charlie

Charlie is an admirably ambitious academic with an impressively well-rounded profile; he is a genuinely interesting young man.

Charlie's subject teachers have always been impressed by him, not least during his Sixth Form career. His Physics Masters report on a young man who is both 'able and very thorough' in his approach to the subject, 'he is very reluctant to leave things unchecked'. They refer to excellence in his ability to express himself (both on paper and through 'enjoyable' and 'productive' oral contributions) and in his motivation ('he seems determined to reach the highest standard of which he is capable')/He seems to have a real passion for Material Science. I think he might just have found the right slot for himself'). In Chemistry, 'he raises some of the most perceptive points to be heard in School' and produces 'some formidable scientific arguments'. He is able to speculate beyond the syllabus 'a great deal' and shows tremendous potential in this subject with continued direction. In Mathematics, 'he has coped with some demanding aspects of further Pure' and 'can set up Mechanics questions with some clarity'; this subject plays a strong supporting role in Charlie's profile. Economics continues to play a significant part in Charlie's curricular studies and he embarks upon the A2 course confident after his success at AS level. His A at French AS was a fitting conclusion to his studies in a subject at which he has excelled throughout his career.

Excellent examination performances (he is only one Distinction away from becoming one of our top scholars, joining an elite group of academics here) have always been matched by an eagerness to involve himself in 'off-piste' intellectual pursuits. It was early in his career here when he asked me to recommend some philosophy for him to read 'for interest and pleasure'. He has frequently submitted winning essays for prizes, internal and external.

Charlie's extra-curricular profile is expansive. He has represented the School on numerous Model United Nations visits and won 'Best Delegate' twice last year; he is now the Secretary of this venture and helps to organize the School's representatives. Charlie has always been an eager journalist, editing our junior newspaper as a younger boy and, as a Sixth Former, the school's most intellectual and philosophical publication as well as our satirical magazine. In House, he has represented us in numerous sports, usually at B team level, though he has won trophies on the river and last year took the responsibility of organizing all of our internal rowing, which included coaching a junior bumping crew, something he did with typical energy and commitment. Charlie's unusual 'piece de resistance' is his interest and talent in the field of magic; he runs the Magic Society and used his talent this year as a way to raise substantial funds at a charities fair.

I would have to say that Charlie is as impressive a young man as I have come across in my career. The multi-faceted nature of his interests and achievements are impressive in their own right but his maturity, sensitivity and compassion are notable strengths which will stand him, I am sure, in very good stead for his further academic career and through to later life.

To be able to strike the balance between ambition and awareness of others at such a young age is unusual. Here is a young man who achieves success and who thoroughly and absolutely deserves it. I have no hesitation in recommending Charlie to you as a potential undergraduate; he is a confident and articulate academic with a warm and engaging personality and is sure to blossom further at University and beyond.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #7 - Clarissa

We are a selective grammar school that sends 95% of its class on to a full time university education. Several of our pupils go on to Oxford and Cambridge each year. Clarissa joined us at the start of year ten; she soon established herself as one of the best students we have ever had in a school of exceptional students.

Clarissa studies a wide variety of challenging subjects. She does Physics, Maths, Further Maths (which she manages on her own on top of an already heavy academic workload), but also English Literature and Economics, which I teach her. This breadth is very unusual at our school, where students generally sit closely linked A-levels. Because of her late entry to the school Clarissa was unable to formally participate in our History or Modern Foreign Languages, but she has repeatedly shown interest in those subjects. She attends a weekly Latin club and has self-taught knowledge of History. Clarissa's desire to learn more than the school has to offer her illustrates one of her defining features, her intense intellectual curiosity.

In the Economics classroom Clarissa is on a level of her own. She picks up new theory effortlessly, but even more remarkable is her ability, and eagerness, to analyse it critically. In my eleven years of teaching she is perhaps the strongest student I have encountered. She does not accept theory on faith, regardless of who developed it (be it Keynes or Freidman). Although her mastery of the subject greatly exceeds the rest of her class, Clarissa always strives to make her thoughts accessible to all. She not only starts and leads classroom discussions, but also ensures that they are lengthy and valuable by including everyone in them.

Clarissa also shows remarkable dedication to her extracurricular activities. At our school we offer a limited range of opportunities for activities outside of the classroom compared to schools in the USA, especially before sixth form, and tend to focus on the academic element of the school more intensely. Although she takes two more A-levels than our average student, Clarissa has proved definitively that a balance can be struck. Always eager to amplify the student voice, she has founded a school newspaper and has been elected chairman of the student council. She also shows a genuine concern for her community, both at school and in the wider world. She has been a founding member of the peer-mentoring program and in establishing relations with a nearby primary school, where she tutored maths pupils. Just as she has done academically, Clarissa has made the most of the extracurricular opportunities available to her, and created some on top of that. In every activity she undertakes she naturally gravitates towards a position of leadership. For this reason she has been appointed deputy head girl, a most significant distinction for a latecomer to the school. The position is one of considerable responsibility that demands the most of Clarissa's leadership abilities. She achieves good results through high expectations of her prefects and a firm but encouraging manner. Clarissa mixes well with all social groups at school, and commands the respect of her year.

In the four years I have known her, I have seen much of Clarissa's character. Her caring for humanity can be seen both in the issues she raises academically, like the economic causes and consequences of inequality, and in her interaction with her classmates. She always makes time to help her peers. For example, she has helped many of her classmates by reading and editing their university applications. Although Clarissa undeniably possesses both moral and intellectual gravitas, she also has a dry sense of humour. Her way of tempering even her most serious thoughts with comic touches makes her a true pleasure to teach.

Clarissa is exceptional on every front. If we were to rank students she would easily be number one; she is simply one of the best and brightest the school has ever seen.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #8 - Cameron

Cameron is without question an absolutely outstanding student. Having moved from America to England at the beginning of Year 10, he gained A* in all nine subjects he took at GCSE, and took five subjects at AS Level, all of which he is taking on to A2. In conversation with him it very quickly becomes apparent how intelligent he is, but he is also very well read, and socially mature and responsible – a natural leader.

Cameron is highly unusual in that he studied at AS Level five subjects (instead of four, namely Economics, Mathematics, Physics, English Literature, and Further Mathematics (this last subject he is doing virtually independently as there is a timetable clash with English Literature). The key descriptor here is ‘independently’: Cameron is extraordinarily self-motivated, full of initiative, and entirely ‘his own man’, while being alert to and interested in others.

In the summer after GCSEs, he won a place on a Harvard Summer School (where he gained 2 As in the Economics courses). He is considered here to be outstanding in Economics, and is already thinking independently (he reads the *Economist* in Form Registration!). His tutors agree that at AS he was way beyond the level of understanding for the course, and was already keen to understand the derivation of theories. They write that he challenges the assumptions on which theories are built, and can apply his knowledge to different contexts with ease. Because his analytical and evaluative skills are already well honed, he can differentiate the key factors that cause differing results. He is a problem-solver; he is able to see a solution very quickly and communicate it effectively. His written work is extremely fluent and coherent and always shows evidence of wider reading. He will flourish at A2 where the greater use of intricate theory in a far more applied manner will suit his curiosity and enjoyment of debate.

Cameron is an excellent mathematician and is exhorted by his tutors to attain ‘near perfection in his examinations’. He has studied Further Mathematics virtually on his own, and regularly asks thought-provoking questions. He is very well motivated – and freely gave of his time mentoring local Year 3 Primary School children gifted in Mathematics. Our Head of Mathematics describes Cameron as thoughtful, well rounded, interested, and well organized.

In Physics, his tutors describe him as strong and well motivated in all aspects of the subject, a creative thinker with very high academic potential.

In addition to his very high ability in these scientific and technical subjects, Cameron has a distinct flair for English Literature and the study of language generally. He is very quick to appreciate linguistic subtlety, and has delighted the class with his original and perceptive interpretations. He has very highly developed powers of analysis and rational synthesis; and his written work, while having a firm backbone of argument very well supported with cogent evidence, also shows the rarer qualities of sheer independence of mind, a sensitive sense of proportion, and a succinct elegance of style and diction. His behaviour in class is very impressive; he has a palpable effect on the rest of the (able) group because of the seriousness of his commitment to the subject; he combines intense concentration with a ready sense of humour; he contributes only when he has something which he thinks is worth saying, so that everything he offers is interesting and often highly

original. He initiates and leads discussion on key points, generously sharing his insights with the rest of the class; and because he listens carefully to others he can often build on their views and so make others feel that their contributions are useful. While he is exceptionally quick to spot flaws in an argument, he often manages to make his point with a deft touch of humour so that it easily commands consent.

In summary, Cameron is an outstanding student on many fronts in this selective Grammar School. He has immense academic potential, but in addition he is a strong character who is admired by his peers and liked by most. He has developed very fine leadership qualities. He was voted Form Representative, a role which he carries out conscientiously, and he is a Peer Mentor. He exercises a stimulating and vibrant influence both in class and in the form group, who enjoy his sense of humour, and respect and want to emulate his abilities. It would be impossible for Cameron to be unaware of his gifts, but he behaves with a quiet modesty of demeanour, and while being very self-confident and intellectually sophisticated and challenging, is without intellectual arrogance and has a sense of fairness. His 'gravitas' has been noted – a word which exactly captures his poise and maturity – though I would also wish to mention his urbanity (among other things he is widely traveled) and social ease. He has a close-knit group of friends of similar intellect.

Cameron has said that he hopes that his main accomplishment here has been to make 'love of learning' a more socially acceptable trait – and he has certainly done that. He is very highly gifted across the sciences and the humanities – a very energetic, ambitious, but also well-balanced individual. He won a place on the highly competitive and prestigious US Telluride Association Summer Programs. We expect him to apply to his native American Universities where he is ideally suited to appreciate the best opportunities that can be offered to him there. He will relish the freedom to study at his own pace, and in areas that challenge him. He will participate in his chosen program to the full, both to his own credit, and to that of the Institution, and to the benefit of his fellows.

As his English Literature and Form Tutor, I consider him to be the most gifted student I have ever taught; he is better than an otherwise comparably outstanding student whom I once taught at the University of Oxford where I was a College Lecturer in the early 1980s – a student who took a First Class Degree.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #9 - Martha

I have taught Martha since she began Latin in year 8 and almost immediately she stood out as a very competent linguist. She grasped the finer points of Latin grammar with enviable alacrity. Her memory for vocabulary too has always been impressive. A quiet girl in her early years, the quietness could never have been ascribed to lack of confidence but rather to a circumspection which has served her well. Martha listens before she speaks and, as a consequence, when she does speak it is because she has something to say. As she has matured, Martha has emerged, even among the academic elite of this school, as a very special character. She is erudite beyond her years. She is well and widely read. She is witty. She has charisma in the most classical sense of "grace". She is also, as was blindingly evident in her recent performance as the drummer in the band of the school play, very cool. Perhaps her most endearing characteristic, however, is that she seems as yet quite innocent of most of these qualities, remaining level headed and even modest about her achievements and abilities.

Here at our school, a most traditional establishment, it is not easy to break out of a fairly narrow mould. Martha is doing this in the same quiet but utterly determined way that in my opinion she will do everything she sets his mind to do. I have predicted that she would gain a Grade A Latin A level since she took the subject as a GCSE. Her hard work and commitment to the subject combine with her natural abilities virtually to guarantee this. It is with the greatest pleasure and the utmost confidence that I recommend Martha to whichever of the world's establishments of higher learning to which she applies.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #10 - Joseph

Joseph is a quite exceptional student, one of the most talented students to have attended this very academic school in the last fifteen years. He is extremely able academically, literate, immensely well organized and highly motivated. He excels both academically and in extra-curricular activities, having recently won a gold medal in the Junior World rowing Championships in Beijing. Having achieved five very good A grades at AS Level, he is now predicted to gain high A grades in all his A Level subjects of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Politics.

Joseph achieved a very high A grade in his AS Level Maths exam in June (290/300) with full marks in his Mechanics paper. A highly talented mathematician, Joseph relishes a fast learning pace, quickly assimilating new ideas and applying them often flawlessly on paper. He combines a mature, positive approach with a close attention to detail and always makes a full contribution to the work of the group.

Joseph brings his organized, thorough approach to Physics where he reads and studies beyond the specification. Logical and systematic, he performs practical work conscientiously and accurately and can bridge between different areas of the subject to synthesise knowledge. He shows pinpoint understanding of key principles.

In Chemistry Joseph has developed into an incisive thinker, demonstrating considerable analytical ability. He has the critical ability to become a researcher. He questions keenly and incisively and a real strength is his ability to analyse critically his results and discard erroneous data.

Joseph again brings a sharp, analytical mind to Government and Politics where he combines excellent subject knowledge with a desire to be well informed about current affairs, contributing thoughtfully and with good political judgment to class discussions. His Parties and Pressure Groups paper at AS Level scored 96/100 marks.

Joseph achieved a High A in his AS Level Critical Thinking (271/300).

In addition to his heavy rowing commitment – this year he is Captain of Boats – Joseph has been an excellent school prefect. He has regularly attended meetings of two of the School's academic societies at which prominent speakers address students.

Joseph is a thoroughly likeable, out-going young man who possesses enormous intellectual talent and who would certainly make the most of a place in higher education, contributing considerably to university life. He is unusually mature for his age and is hugely respected by his peers for his feats as an international oarsman and his sharp intellect. He has the resilience, stamina and independence that would be needed in a university abroad. I do not hesitate to give him my very strongest recommendation.

Helpful Teacher Recommendation #11 - Sean

Sean joined our school five years ago having been awarded an academic scholarship. Since then he has excelled in every area of school life, and leaves us in a very strong position. Academically he is one of our strongest candidates in a Year Group of some 150 students, within a school which is highly academically selective. If he is unsuccessful in his application to Harvard, we are hopeful that he will be offered a place to read Philosophy and Theology at Oxford University. Further information on Sean's academic profile can be found in the academic references submitted by his teachers.

Away from his studies, too, Sean has enjoyed five immensely successful years at our school. His greatest achievements have been in rowing, a sport in which he is showing considerable promise for the future. We are currently the leading rowing school in the UK, and Sean has been one of our leading oarsmen throughout his time here, rowing in the 1st VIII for the last three years. Over and above this he has also rowed for Great Britain at Under 16 and Under 18 level, and also for Wales, and will be a strong candidate for selection to National Senior Rowing in due course.

Sean has also taken part in a very wide variety of other activities, both athletic and other, and is impressive in that he manages to combine top-level rowing with strong academic performance and a healthy breadth of interest and involvement. He has sung in inter-house singing competitions, acted on the stage, played soccer and cricket.

In this his final year, Sean was appointed a School Prefect, one of the top twenty students of the 150 in his year, with collective responsibility for helping with the day to day running of the school, and, importantly, meeting with the Headmaster and Senior Management Team on a weekly basis, to discuss school issues, advise with policy decisions and represent the views of fellow students. Over and above this, Sean is also Head of House in a boarding house of 60 students ranging in age from 13 to 18. In this role he is my key advisor and sounding board, and plays a leading role in the day to day running of the house and care of the students. It is a role he has fulfilled with exceptional maturity and dedication. He is seen by me and by my colleagues as an entirely reliable and helpful leader within the student body, and by fellow students as a role model, a caring advisor, and kind hearted 'elder brother' figure.

Modest, humorous, good fun and a very easy person to get on with, Sean is impressive also in his even temper and equanimity. I have never known him to lose his cool, to get carried away, or even to be anything less than his usual cheerful, 'cool, calm and collected' self. His disciplinary record is squeaky clean: he has not put a foot wrong.

Sean is an impressive all rounder, and all indications are that he still has not reached his ceiling. He will thrive at whatever university he ends up at, and will contribute vastly both academically and as an athlete. I am delighted to be able to recommend him to you.