**General Outline of the Recommendation Letter**

*Recommendation letters are letters written by professors who know you, assessing you capacity to meet the requirements of a program you are applying for. They're supposed to help decision-makers to get a better picture of your potential. Due to different reasons, if you are a student in Eastern Europe (including Russia) you will often find yourself in the position to write these letters yourself. The professor will, in this case, only proof-read and signs the text.*

**First Paragraph**  
  
Recommendation letter usually starts by stating the name of the professor who writes the letter and his/her title, together with the name of the student for whom the letter is written. The professor should also state since when has s/he known the students: year, class or other activity. It should in any case be clear that the professor had the opportunity to get to know the student well and assess his/her capabilities. If the person does research work under your guidance, indicate the type of research, the responsibilities of the student, and any significant projects undertaken by the individual. You may wish to include a sentence about the nature of your research group and its activities. Here, you can also give a one-sentence summary or overview of your opinion of the recommended individual.   
  
  
**Next 2-4 Paragraphs**   
  
The assessment of the student’s capabilities should be made from a multiple point of view over the next 3-4 paragraphs. From a professional point of view, it should give account of the student’s knowledge, interests and capabilities, activities and results, work capacity, etc. Personally, it should assess the student’s personal characteristics, character, social skills, his or her relations with the students and professors. Same as in other application documents, the direction should be from facts/experience to qualifications, and from those, to value judgments. Especially those skills relevant for the desired program should be outlined throughout the paper.  
  
Concentrate on several different aspects of the person. Specifically identify his/her skills, attitudes, personal attributes, and growth, as well as his/her contributions to and performance within your organization. Also, if you do make negative comments, back them up with facts.   
  
Beware of the power of words! Some words seem harmless in every day conversation, but carry positive or negative connotations to a prospective employer.   
Avoid bland words such as:   
nice, good, fairly, reasonable, decent, satisfactory, I hope, for sure   
Use powerful words such as:   
articulate, effective, sophisticated, intelligent, observant, significant, expressive, creative, efficient, cooperative, imaginative, assertive, dependable, mature, innovative   
  
Some excellent points to address would be the following:   
ability to communicate, intelligence, self-confidence, willingness to accept responsibility, initiative, leadership, energy level, imagination, flexibility, interpersonal skills, self-knowledge, ability to handle conflict, goal achievement, competitiveness, appropriate research skills, direction.   
  
  
**Final Paragraph**  
  
The final paragraph should provide an overall assessment of the student’s potential to fulfill the requirements of the program, even though partial judgments can and should be provided in the body of the letter. You can make a more broad characterization of the individual and his or her demeanor. Finally, indicate the degree to which you recommend the individual to the program she or he is seeking: recommend without reservation, strongly recommend, highly recommend, enthusiastically recommend.   
**Some Remarks**

Most recommendation forms contain a certain number of fields, the multiple-choice kind, where the professor has to assess, by checking cells, your abilities. Make sure those fields are checked and insert the text in the place left for additional remarks. Do not leave blank that portion of the form, but use it instead as a self-standing recommendation letter.  
  
Some of the graduate study programs supply you with forms for the recommendation letters that ask the professor to ask a number of specific questions about your skills and qualifications. Sometimes, space for the answer is allowed after each question, and there is where the answers should be written, rather than on a separate sheet of paper. Other times, the questions come as a block, an in this case you have the option to answer the question still in the form of a letter. Should you chose this option, make sure the letter answers clearly every single question, preferably in the order in which they are asked on the form.   
  
Don't forget to write the date and the name of the home university. The name of the program you are applying for should come out explicitly in the body of the text, in order to make clear that the letter has been written for that occasion.   
  
  
**Sincerely,**

**Mr. Hulk**

**Title**

**Company name**

**Contact email**