



MBA & EMBA RECOMMENDATION BRAINSTORMING TEMPLATE

AS FEATURED IN THE resumeSTORY.builders' BOOK,

***MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: RECOMMENDATIONS - Write Your Own
Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples***

INSTRUCTIONS

PRELIMINARY STEP: OBTAIN RECOMMENDATION PROMPTS

Before you begin, you'll need the recommendation questions from the MBA or EMBA program. Many programs publish their questions on their website (to aid applicants in choosing recommenders). If your program hasn't published its recommendation questions, you can obtain them by creating a dummy applicant account and then sending a recommendation request to yourself. You'll need two emails to do this, one to create the dummy account and the other to receive the recommendation request. Bonus: by accessing the online recommendation form, you'll be able to see whether the school asks recommenders to a) upload a PDF version of their recommendation to an online form (in which case no strict recommendation word limit is enforced) or b) copy and paste answers to the recommendation questions into an online form (in which case schools sometimes enforce a strict recommendation word or character limit).

STEP 1: STRUCTURE YOUR OUTLINE USING THE GENERAL STATEMENTT → STORY FORMULA

The GENERAL STATEMENT → STORY FORMULA is explained in section 2.1 of the book *MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: Recommendations - Write Your Own Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples*

Here’s an example of the formula applied to the most common MBA and EMBA recommendation questions.

BRAINSTORMING GRID with Typical Recommendation Questions and Suggested Outline	
From section 2.2 of the book, <i>MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: Recommendations - Write Your Own Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples</i>	
	Recommender #1
SHORT ANSWER: Please provide a brief description of your interaction with the applicant and, if applicable, their role in your organization.	YOUR IDEAS
1. How do the applicant's performance, potential, background, or personal qualities compare to those of other well-qualified individuals in similar roles? Please provide specific examples.	YOUR IDEAS - Strength 1 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 1: - Strength 2 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 2: - (optional) Strength 3 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: - (optional) STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 3:

	<p>RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength 1 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 1: - Strength 2 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 2: - (optional) Strength 3 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (optional) STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Strength 3:
<p>2. Please describe the most important piece of constructive feedback you have given the applicant. Please detail the circumstances and the applicant's response.</p>	<p>YOUR IDEAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weakness 1 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Weakness 1: - How the applicant reacted to constructive feedback regarding Weakness 1 and what steps they've taken since to correct course. <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weakness 1 as a GENERAL STATEMENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY or example that illustrates and substantiates Weakness 1: - How the applicant reacted to constructive feedback regarding Weakness 1 and what steps they've taken since to correct course.
<p>3. (Optional) Is there anything else we should know? Please be concise.</p>	<p>YOUR IDEAS</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS</p>

STEP 2: YOUR IDEAS

Fill out the BRAINSTORMING GRID with your ideas.

Populate the brainstorming grid with the recommendation questions. Then jot down your thoughts next to each question in the section labeled *your ideas*. Do this BEFORE asking for input from your recommender (Step 3). That way, your thoughts aren't influenced by what your recommender has to say.

STEP 3: RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS

Approach your recommender, solicit their input, and add their insights to the BRAINSTORMING GRID.

Get started by scheduling a 15-minute in-person or video conference meeting with your recommender. You can either send them an email with the recommendation questions ahead of the meeting or present them with the questions during the meeting. During your meeting, you'll be asking for your recommender's reaction to each question. Take notes while speaking to your recommender or record the conversation and jot down notes afterward. Later, add their input to the *recommender's insights* section of the brainstorming grid.

To solicit your recommender's thoughts, try saying things like, *"When you read this question, does a particular quality, strength, or weakness of mine come to mind? Are there any stories or examples you recall that relate to that quality, strength, or weakness?"*.

You'll notice that most schools are interested in how you compare with professionals with the same rank as you or in a role similar to yours. Be sure to stress this to your recommenders and ask for their input. *"How do I compare to other associates you've supervised in the past?"* Your recommender may surprise you (in a good way) by suggesting material you may not have initially considered or by looking at things from a different angle than you would have.

Note: Generating material can be the most challenging aspect of writing the recommendation outline (a.k.a. talking points). That's because you (the MBA or EMBA applicant) are probably too involved in your day-to-day work to be a clear-eyed judge of your own strengths and weaknesses. Generating material becomes twice as complicated when you must provide talking points or write complete recommendations for *two* recommenders.

Often, when applicants are asked to craft their own recommendation letters, the final product tends to mirror strengths and values the applicant has already implied or explicitly stated in other documents (essays, resume, etc.). As a result, recommendations can end up ‘sounding’ like the rest of the application because the applicant starts to run out of material.

I mention this because I want to stress the importance of obtaining feedback from your recommenders (in other words, don’t skip step 3).

STEP 4: RECOMMENDER’S INSIGHTS

Use your completed Recommendation Brainstorming Template to finalize your recommendation outline.

Recommendation Brainstorming Grid with Typical Recommendation Questions

From the book, *MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: Recommendations - Write Your Own Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples*

QUESTION	Recommender #1	NAME	Recommender #2	NAME
SHORT ANSWER: Please provide a brief description of your interaction with the applicant and, if applicable, their role in your organization.	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
1. How do the applicant's performance, potential, background, or personal qualities compare to those of other well-qualified individuals in similar roles? Please provide specific examples.	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
2. Please describe the most important piece of constructive feedback you have given the applicant. Please detail the circumstances and the applicant's response.	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
3. (optional) Is there anything else we should know?	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	

Recommendation Brainstorming Grid				
<i>From the book, MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: Recommendations - Write Your Own Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples</i>				
QUESTION	Recommender #1	NAME	Recommender #2	NAME
SHORT QUESTION: Question here	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
SHORT QUESTION: Question here	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
1. Question here	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
2. Question here	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	
3. Question here	Recommender's Insights		Recommender's Insights	
	Candidate's Ideas		Candidate's Ideas	

	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas
4. Question here	Recommender's Insights	Recommender's Insights
	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas
5. Question here	Recommender's Insights	Recommender's Insights
	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas
6. Question here	Recommender's Insights	Recommender's Insights
	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas
7. Question here	Recommender's Insights	Recommender's Insights
	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas
8. Question here	Recommender's Insights	Recommender's Insights
	Candidate's Ideas	Candidate's Ideas

Sarah's **BRAINSTORMING GRID** for
HBS full-time MBA, Columbia part-time MBA, Duke Fuqua full-time MBA, Wharton full-time MBA

From section 2.5 of the book, *MBA & EMBA APPLICATION GUIDE: Recommendations - Write Your Own Professional Letter of Recommendation with 25+ Examples*

QUESTION	RECOMMENDER #1	NICK GEURTS
SHORT ANSWER: Please provide a brief description of your interaction with the applicant and, if applicable, their role in your organization.	Nick is the Lead Applications Engineer in the Mining Division at Caterpillar. Initially we worked together on projects from YEAR to YEAR. In YEAR I joined Nick's team and he became my direct supervisor until I left Caterpillar in YEAR.	
1. How do the applicant's performance, potential, background, or personal qualities compare to those of other well-qualified individuals in similar roles? Please provide specific examples. (Recommended: 300 words)	<p>YOUR IDEAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength 1 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Conscientious <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 1: I always make sure that I do that right thing in a situation (looking out for our collective interests not personal ones). For example, I was willing to respectfully push back against a director that everyone was afraid of when I saw that his demands for additional testing were baseless. - Strength 2 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Keeps projects on track <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 2: In project meetings I'm always trying to keep conversations on track (while also allowing for people to freely share their views). A missed deadline is probably the thing I dread the most and a lot of my management style reflects this. A good example of a project that I kept on track is the coordination of trials for a new drive shaft which resulted in market share jumping to 65% worldwide for our 1 ton+ mining trucks. <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength 1 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Good interpersonal skills / Builds bridges 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY E Strength 1: Nick cited me breaking the ice in internal and client meetings on multiple occasions. Nick also mentioned how the Director of R&D really values me for my bridge building skills (especially with union guys on the shop floor). - Strength 2 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Creative / Lateral thinker <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 2: Nick cited the way I figured out how to do selective testing on the new transmission for our 700-mining truck line. It's now a best practice in the group but prior to me coming along, nobody had a deep enough understanding of statistics (sample sets and confidence intervals) to come up with the solution I did.
<p>2. Please provide example(s) that illustrate why you believe this applicant will find success in the Wharton MBA classroom. (Wharton MBA Only)</p>	<p>YOUR IDEAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength 1 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Analytical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 1: A lot of the topics covered in the Wharton curriculum require analytical thinking. That's something I do every day in my work - not only solving engineering problems but teaching (mentoring) others in how to solve for issues using math etc. - Strength 2 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Inclusive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 2: I asked our summer interns to participate in the President's Counsel (an internal group of employees representing all departments who make suggestions to the board). This created extra work for me (in terms of ensuring they were able to participate in discussions) but (perhaps) paid dividends (both interns eagerly accepted full time offers, something we've struggled with in the past). <p>RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength 1 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Motivated individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 1: You have the drive to continue growing your skill set at work and pursue a graduate degree. Drive is the most important factor in success and Nick says that he sees that in my everyday work (staying late to get a client presentation right) and in bigger initiatives like applying to Wharton. - Strength 2 as GENERAL STATEMENT: Inclusive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - STORY Strength 2: Nick says that I'm good at being in a leadership role but making others feel that there is no hierarchy in the group. Being inclusive in team meetings.

2. Please describe the most important piece of constructive feedback you have given the applicant. Please detail the circumstances and the applicant's response.

(Recommended: 250 words)
(Harvard MBA, Columbia MBA, Duke MBA)

YOUR IDEAS

- **Weakness 1 as GENERAL STATEMENT:** Perfectionist

- **STORY Weakness 1:** Ended up spending 2 of my 5 vacation days in the office last August because I wasn't happy with custom catalytic converter design for Newcrest Mining in Australia. Many other examples of giving up personal time to get the job done right.

- **How the applicant reacted to constructive feedback regarding Weakness 1 and what steps they've taken since to correct course:** Nick has mentioned that our insurance policy doesn't cover me coming in on vacation days (as a joke). Nick has asked me to consider whether I am indeed overwhelmed with work or whether I am not managing my time well. After some soul searching, I realized that using the Pomodoro method of time management would help me avoid the late nights in the office.

RECOMMENDER'S INSIGHTS

- **Weakness as GENERAL STATEMENT 1:** Confident / Lack's confidence

- **Anecdote Weakness 1:** In my last annual review Nick mentioned that when I'm in a structured environment where roles are clearly defined (such as when I'm leading a project meeting), I am confident and even outgoing - engaging people in conversation. On the flip side he said that in less structured situations I seem shy and perhaps lack confidence. He cited me needing to reach out to clients OUTSIDE of formal meetings and also take initiative to network OUTSIDE Caterpillar.

- **How the applicant reacted to constructive feedback regarding Weakness 1 and what steps they've taken since to correct course:** I've heeded Nick's advice. I respect Nick and at the time I thanked him for being so frank with me. I have since begun reaching out to clients/joining outside professional associations to network.