

HOW TO WRITE A DEPARTMENTAL LETTER
Appointments and Advancements
 (Revised 4/23)

Accurate and analytical letters of recommendation from the department are essential in the review process. The candidate and his/her department must make the case; other reviewing agencies cannot do so. The analysis should be extensive, and for promotions, merits to step VI and to Above Scale the analysis should cover the cumulative record of the candidate. In cases where acceleration is recommended, explicit justification must be given for the recommendation. In any case, the letter should clarify which of the candidate's accomplishments precede the last review and which follow.

Personnel reviews that have been deferred due to a family accommodation (i.e. childbearing or parental leave, extension of the tenure clock) should be evaluated without prejudice as if the work were done in the normal period of service. The departmental letter should clearly state that the standard expectations are being applied.

The departmental letter should provide a summary of both the positive and negative aspects of the case. Direct quotes from faculty ballots or from the departmental discussion should be avoided. The analysis overall should strive for balance. It should identify criticisms and reservations, especially when there is significant opposition to the recommendation. It should, if indicated, include an assessment of the significance of particular extramural views or judgments. In the case of a negative departmental recommendation, the basis of the recommendation should be documented as well.

Individuals who have provided confidential letters of evaluation should not be identified, except by means of a coded list (e.g., "Reviewer A"). Note that in career reviews (promotions and advancement to step VI or Above Scale), the department letter should provide an overview of career accomplishment as well as the achievements of the most recent review period.

The letter should provide a comprehensive assessment of the candidate's qualifications together with detailed evidence to support this evaluation. The letter should be a complete professional evaluation (accurate and analytic), including both supportive and contrary evidence. At the same time the letter should be succinct. Extended quotations from supporting documents (e.g. external letters, bio-bib) and rhetorical statements are to be avoided, since overly long letters are a burden to all reviewing agencies. The Chair should make clear which portions of his/her letter refer to the candidate's past accomplishments and which refer to accomplishments falling within the current review period.

Teaching, research, professional and public service contributions that promote diversity and equal opportunity are to be encouraged and given due recognition in the evaluation of the candidate's record. Contributions to diversity and equal opportunity may include effort to advance equitable access to education, public service that addresses the needs of diverse populations, or research in a scholar's area of expertise that highlights inequalities. Mentoring and advising of students and faculty members from underrepresented and underserved populations is within the scope of expected duties; however, highly significant efforts should also be given due recognition.

Suggested format for letters of recommendation

1. Brief outline of the mechanisms used for soliciting information and evaluating the academic performance of colleagues in cases of merits, promotions, and so forth (e.g., departmental use of ad hoc committees, teaching evaluation committees, departmental meetings to assess candidates, etc.). Explanation of any apparent anomalies in the voting, e.g., a disproportionately small number of votes relative to departmental size, or excessive abstentions should also be explained.
2. The basis for the departmental recommendation, including analytical evaluation of the performance in **each area of review appropriate to the academic series.**

A) Research

Appointees to the Lecturer SOE series will be evaluated using a single category of Professional and/or Scholarly achievement and Activity rather than two separate categories of Research and Professional Activity.

Present a full evaluation of candidate's research record, indicating the significance of the research accomplishments.

The departmental letter should present the publication record for the current review period according to the following format: [A] Published work; [B] Work in press; [C] Work submitted.

In certain fields such as art, architecture, dance, music, literature, and drama, distinguished creativity should receive consideration equivalent to that accorded to distinction attained in research. In evaluating artistic creativity, an attempt should be made to define the candidate's merit in the light of such criteria as originality, scope, richness, and depth of creative expression. An important element of distinction is the extent of regional, national, or international recognition.

The departmental letter must assess the degree and quality of the candidate's role in any collaborative work, or explain why such assessment is impracticable.

B) Teaching

The department letter should include a statement of the normative teaching load and how the candidate's obligation was met for the review period. For example:

- The normal department teaching load is [X] courses per academic year. During the current review period, Professor [] taught [] (explain if partial credits) at the undergraduate level and [] (explain if partial credits) at the graduate level. This fulfilled the teaching requirement for the review period.

(If applicable, incorporate the following):

- As part of their expected teaching load, Professor [] additionally taught [course] during Summer [20__], which constitutes a core component of the curriculum of the department (only in cases when summer teaching is a required component of teaching load).
- During the review period, Professor [] had [] releases for [] (sabbatical, grant, overload previous cycle, etc.).
- [OR] This was an overload of [] that will/will not affect course load expectations in future cycles (explain if course reduction will occur in future cycle).
- [OR] This was [] course/s short of normative teaching expectations that will/will not be made up in the next review cycle.

The letter should assess the overall contributions of the candidate to the departmental curriculum on lower-division, upper-division, and graduate instruction. The department assessment might also evaluate the candidate's contribution to academic advising, thesis and dissertation directorship, committee work relating to the curriculum, "mentoring" colleagues, or frequency of invited lectures given by the candidate.

The letter should include an evaluation of the candidate's teaching performance, including an analytical evaluation of the ESCI scores and indicating the significance of the record. The letter should clearly indicate which courses were evaluated on-line and should take into consideration the possible impact of the change in methodology from paper to on-line evaluation. The analysis should include information on the number of graduate committees (MA and Ph.D. as reflected in the bio-bibliography).

C. Professional Activity

Appointees to the Lecturer SOE series will be evaluated using a single category of Professional and/or Scholarly achievement and Activity rather than two separate categories of Research and Professional Activity.

The departmental letter should include a full analysis of the candidate's performance, indicating the most prominent features of the record. The significance of honors, awards and extramural grants should be described. If a contract or grant is listed as "continuing", detail of any changes in the funding should be provided. When the candidate is listed as co-PI, the departmental letter should clarify the candidate's share of the grant money and role in the project.

D. University and Public Service

The letter should include a full analysis of candidate's involvement, indicating the significance of the record and the quality of the service.

3. Summary

This section is optional, and may be used to summarize the most significant accomplishment of the review period, and to provide an explicit justification for acceleration or other special action.

In cases of appraisal, departments may make one of the following three recommendations: a) Continued Candidacy: indicating an assessment that the candidate is likely to eventually qualify for promotion to tenure rank. B) Continued Candidacy with Reservations: indicating an assessment that there is an identified weakness in the record that appears to require correction in order for the individual to eventually qualify for promotion to tenure rank. C) Terminal appointment. In addition, the letter must also include an evaluation of the performance as progress toward eventual tenure.

Chair's Separate Confidential Letter

While this option is not often used, the Chair may, in accordance with APM 220-80e, submit a separate letter indicating his/her own analysis and recommendation. This letter is not made available to other members of the faculty in the department. It should be noted that a Chair's separate letter is designed to be evaluative of the evidence available to the department; new evidence can be considered on the rare occasions when it could not be appropriately shared with the department. A Chair's confidential letter may also be used to address unresolved issues between majority and minority opinions related to a case, or to address a candidate's comments in response to the departmental review. When a Chair submits a confidential "Chair's separate letter", it should be clearly identified as such, and will become part of the personnel review file. The status of such a letter is considered to be non-departmental (as is a letter from a dean). It is not submitted to an ad hoc review committee when one is convened. As a "confidential academic review record" (as defined in APM 160-20-b), a Chair's letter will be made available to the candidate upon request along with other review agency reports at the end of the review process.