

## Holistic Reference Letter Template

*Western University is committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization (EDIAD) and the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) at Western University is committed to achieving and supporting a diverse graduate community. To support this commitment, we have changed important aspects of our application and admission processes to align them with the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization. This has included revision of our reference letters in an effort to minimize unconscious bias and to highlight the characteristics that enable students to thrive in graduate education. We greatly appreciate your support of these efforts and, more importantly, your support of applicants to our programs.*

---

Unconscious biases are common; they benefit some individuals and disadvantage others. Unconscious bias within letters of recommendation or reference can contribute to underrepresentation of individuals from equity-deserving groups and can have unintended negative effects on the overall success and career of individuals—especially individuals from equity-deserving groups.

To limit the influence of unconscious bias, please consider the following when completing this reference:

- Avoid comparing the applicant to others whom you know; rather, focus on the applicant and how the applicant demonstrates the qualities listed below.
- Separate how you feel about the applicant from the facts that you know about them.
- Avoid using stereotypical adjectives when describing the applicant's character, skills, and qualities. For example, try to avoid words such as: nice, kind, agreeable, sympathetic, giving, warm, nurturing, maternal, etc.
- When using superlative descriptors, such as excellent or outstanding, support them with evidence/examples.
- Include personal information about the applicant only if it is directly relevant to the reference.
- Consider whether your letter unintentionally includes gaps, or doubt-raising, negative or unexplained statements, such as 'might make an excellent leader' versus 'demonstrates the qualities of a leader'.

How long have you known the applicant?

In what capacity have you known the applicant?

Thinking about your interactions with and knowledge of the applicant, how would you describe the applicant in terms of each of the following. Please comment on the characteristics you are able to and, where possible, please provide an example.

**Work Ethic**

**Integrity**

**Resilience and Ability to Overcome Challenges**

**Willingness/Openness to Learning**

**Oral Communication**

**Written Communication**

**Curiosity**

**Critical Thinking**

**Ability to Contribute as Part of a Team**

**Adaptability/Flexibility**

**Community Engagement**

**Humility**

Is there anything else you would like to share about the applicant's potential for graduate studies?