

Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships

Notes on Letters of Reference

When to say no:

The Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships (MR) are *extremely* competitive. If you are not able to write a strong recommendation or do not have time to prepare a 1.5 to 2-page letter, it is best to decline.

Applicants should request letters well in advance, provide information on the scholarship, discuss with you their reasons for applying, and share copies of their materials. If you have not been given adequate time or information, you may choose to decline.

Note on providing feedback to applicants:

Applicants **may not receive feedback** on their Rhodes personal statement from anyone. Conversations about “personal goals and Oxford ambitions” should take place *before* drafts are started. You may consult a draft to assist your letter writing but cannot offer *any* feedback. You **can provide feedback** on Marshall materials.

Please review [our general guide](#) on recommendations and read through specific information on each fellowship below.

Writing a letter of recommendation for an endorsed candidate:

Even if you wrote a letter of recommendation for the campus endorsement process, **you are now asked to tailor your letter to each fellowship** (note graduate programs selected, name of fellowship) and **upload different letters** to the online system for each individual fellowship.

What is the process?

Your student will register you on each scholarship’s system, and you will receive instructions to submit your letter.

- **For the Marshall:** maximum **1000 words**. Upload **one week prior to the national deadline (TBD)**, as all applications must be forwarded to the Marshall Commission **by our office**. Applications lacking letters cannot be forwarded and the student will be disqualified from the competition.
- If you wish to make changes after submitting, [contact the fellowships office](#). Once the student’s application has been forwarded, however, no changes may be made; **late letters cannot not be added and will result in a student’s disqualification**.
- **For the Rhodes:** maximum **2 pages**. Submit electronically by **Friday, September 27 for US Rhodes**. **You must do this: we do not have access to the system.**
- Most finalist **interviews** will take place in mid-November. We will hear all final results by early December.

Please see the following pages for specific information about each fellowship.

What makes a strong letter of recommendation for competitive scholarships:

Speak to what you know best and what you know first-hand.

Academic references should be the type of letter which will help students gain admission to top graduate programs. We have found that, unless a student is first in a class, it is not helpful to give a class ranking. However, if a student could be said to be the best in some specific way (most insightful, strongest writer, for example), please include this alongside a brief explanation. All letters should make clear that the applicant has the potential to perform well in their chosen program abroad, where students are likely to be much more independent than at Yale.

Leadership or character references should show the type of person the applicant is at their core, especially how they interact with others, how they deal with adversity, and what are their guiding principles.

Past endorsement committees have found that it is most helpful if you provide details, examples, or anecdotes to support your claims. Discuss a student's personal characteristics as well as their intellectual ability from *personal* knowledge.

Notes on references for the UK:

- The adjective "quite" does not connote "very" in British usage; instead, it means "somewhat."
- British readers often question unrelentingly glowing praise; a thoughtful qualification can improve a letter.

Writing for the Marshall:

The [Marshall Scholarships](#) are intended for scholars who will contribute to the advancement of knowledge and for individuals who will be leaders in their fields, to motivate them to act as ambassadors from the US to the UK and vice versa throughout their lives. See [detailed criteria](#) and the [Scholarship's guidance for recommenders](#). Look to comment on attributes of the candidate relevant to these considerations.

If you have first-hand knowledge of them, your letter could address any of the following characteristics:

- Distinction of intellect and character as evidenced by a student's scholastic and extracurricular achievements.
- Adequate preparation for the proposed course of study and ability to work independently.
- Reasons why the candidate's studies and career would be best served by attending a British university.
- Potential to make a significant contribution as a leader in their field.
- Ambassadorial potential, evidence of past bridge-building.

The **Primary Academic Letter** needs to offer expert support for the candidate's suitability for the proposed course of study and a substantive assessment of the candidate's academic qualifications. It should be the kind of letter you would write to a top graduate program. This letter can be part of an initial screening and carries special weight.

*The official online application will only accept letters of 1,000 words or fewer.

Writing for the Rhodes:

The [Rhodes Scholarship](#) is "looking for students who exhibit well-rounded excellence with a 'bulge'—some distinctive quality that really stands out from the many other excellent applicants." The most helpful letters provide detail about what makes the applicant a genuinely remarkable individual. The [US Rhodes](#) is intended for people who will be leaders in their fields and tirelessly contribute to the well-being of others.

If you have first-hand knowledge of them, your letter could address any of the following characteristics:

- Proven intellectual and academic achievement of the highest standard.
- Integrity of character and demonstrated respect for others.
- The ability to lead and the energy to use their talents to the full.

- *“Excellence in qualities of mind and in qualities of person which, in combination, offer the promise of effective service to the world in the decades ahead”.*

Rhodes Scholarship Committees are especially respectful of letters that are both glowing and genuine. Because committees may be skeptical of letters that are too effusive or unqualified in their praise, recommenders are encouraged to adopt a forthright tone.

Letters should be no more than **2 pages**.

Thank you very much for your support of this applicant!