WRITING REFERENCE LETTERS FOR GRADUATE STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITIONS

This template is designed to help you write a strong support letter that maps onto the Tri-Agency Scholarship evaluation criteria (see **Sections II and III; specific criteria are provided at the end of this document**). Suggestions for introductory and concluding paragraphs are provided. General tips are given at the end of this document.

I. Introductory paragraph

Give a little background. What is the student's role in the program, how do you know them (supervisor, course instructor, etc.), and for how long? Consider ranking them relative to other students at the same career stage (e.g., Kermit received a grade of 93 in my course and was therefore the top student in my class; Beaker is the most innovative and independent PhD student with whom I have interacted in my 20-year career at Western). Show enthusiasm here if you think the student deserves the award, and use strong adjectives (e.g., "outstanding," "the very best") if the student merits it; however, be sure to back those adjectives up with examples.

II. Indicators of research ability and potential (2nd, 3rd, etc. paragraphs)

In this section, you should describe the student's:

- Relevant background and current training
- Research experience and achievements relative to the applicant's stage of study
- Quality of contributions and extent to which they advance the field
- Demonstration of sound judgment and ability to think critically
- Enthusiasm for research, originality, initiative, autonomy
- Ability to communicate theoretical, technical, and/or scientific concepts clearly and logically in written and oral formats
- Quality of research proposal (esp. significance and expected impact, feasibility and fit to expertise at Western)

III. Relevant experience and achievements (in academia but also other contexts; 4th, 5th, etc. paragraphs)

In this section, touch upon the student's:

- Scholarships, awards, and distinctions (amount, duration, prestige)
- Academic record
- Professional, academic and extracurricular activities as well as collaborations with supervisors, colleagues, peers, students, and members of the community, such as:
  - teaching, mentoring, supervising, and/or coaching
  - managing projects
  - participating in science and/or research promotion
  - community outreach, volunteer work, and/or civic engagement

- o chairing committees, organizing conferences and meetings, participating in university organizations, associations, clubs, etc.

IV. Concluding statement

Here is your chance to summarize what stands out to you regarding this student and to emphasize how much you support their application. Be effusive if you think the student deserves the award; tepid letters and those that are merely descriptive will have a negative impact on the application.

<div align="center">

General Tips

</div>

This has already been noted, but if you want a student to be competitive, make it clear that you support them. Be effusive. Letters that are vague or otherwise lack concrete examples are interpreted as low support for an application. Assuming that is not your goal, sing the applicant's praises.

Scholarships are reviewed by committee members from diverse fields. For this reason, contextualize the student's accomplishments for those unfamiliar with norms for your subdiscipline of social science. For example, for students with publications and conference papers, **explain how their record compares to that of their peers**. For example, "Animal's first-authored article in *J of Fancy Schmancy Science* is impressive given the high impact factor of this outlet for my field (5.75). "As an MSc 2 student, it is impressive that Gonzo is developing a manuscript for publication while also presenting his work at international conferences."

Back up your description of the student with specific examples. How is this student ambitious, creative, industrious, a "quick study," etc.?

Avoid gender bias in your letters. This is especially pertinent in our Faculty given that many of our students are female. We want them to succeed.

I cannot vouch for the science behind this calculator, but it's interesting to test drive:

http://slowe.github.io/genderbias/

The evaluation of CGS D applications, whether by institutions or the agencies, is based on the following criteria:

Criteria	Description	Weight

Research ability and potential	Indicators of research ability and potential:
	
	• Quality of research proposal
	   o specific, focused, and feasible research question(s) and objective(s)
	   o clear description of the proposed methodology
	   o significance and expected contributions to research
	• Relevant training, such as academic training, lived experience and traditional teachings
	• Research experience and achievements relative to the applicant's stage of study, lived experience and knowledge systems
	• Quality of contributions and extent to which they advance the field of research. Contributions may include publications, patents, reports, posters, abstracts, monographs, presentations, creative outputs, knowledge translation outputs, community products, etc.*
	• Demonstration of sound judgment and ability to think critically
	• Demonstration of responsible and ethical research conduct, including honest and thoughtful inquiry, rigorous analysis, commitment to safety and to the dissemination of research results and adherence to the use of professional standards
	• Enthusiasm for research, originality, initiative, autonomy, relevant community involvement and outreach
	• The ability or potential to communicate theoretical, technical and/or scientific concepts clearly and logically in written and oral formats
		50%

Criteria	Description	Weight

Relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia	Indicators of relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia:
	
	• Scholarships, awards and distinctions (amount, duration and prestige)
	• Academic record:
	   o Transcripts
	   o Duration of previous studies
	   o Program requirements and courses pursued
	   o Course load
	   o Relative standing in program (if available)
	• Professional, academic and extracurricular activities as well as collaborations with supervisors, colleagues, peers, students and members of the community, such as:
	   o teaching, mentoring, supervising and/or coaching
	   o managing projects
	   o participating in science and/or research promotion
	   o community outreach, volunteer work and/or civic engagement
	   o chairing committees and/or organizing conferences and meetings
	   o participating in departmental or institutional organizations, associations, societies and/or clubs
		50%