

Postgraduate Opportunities at CERN

Reference Letter Guidance

CERN fellowships are a very prestigious opportunity for early careers researchers, and are an excellent way of launching them into academia.

A reference letter is a critical part of any application, and is even more prominent when assessing post-doctoral position. In being asked to produce a reference letter you should first consider your obligations in doing so:

- To the student
 - Help obtain deserved funding and recognition
- To the reader
 - Provide useful data to select the best candidate(s)
- To society and the profession
 - Give credit where credit is due
- To yourself
 - Maintain your honesty, integrity and reputation

To prepare for writing the letter you should first make sure that you have as much information about the candidate as possible; one of the worst things that a reference can do is appear generic! The reference letter should cover no more than two A4 pages, and cover the topics below without including extraneous information/waffle that can mask the message.

- Introduction
 - Introduces yourself and the student
 - State your professional relationship, placing it into context
- Scientific text (quantify and compare applicants strengths and weaknesses)
 - Introduce work that the candidate has completed so far
 - Highlight significant intellectual contributions (papers, talks, etc.)
 - State specific research skills, with detailed examples
 - Comment on the candidate's leadership and teamwork in an academic environment, with detailed examples.
- Personal Text (note candidates attributes)
 - Interpersonal skills, personal attributes and special interests that make the candidate unique
 - Personality/Character
 - Extracurricular activities/teaching involvement (items above & beyond what's required)
- Conclusion
 - Final comments on the student's impact
 - Consider ranking the student (e.g. top 5% of students I have mentored....)
 - State your recommendation clearly

You should write a letter of recommendation only if you can honestly write a supportive letter for someone for a given position. If you don't know the candidate well enough to write a good letter or have reservations, let the candidate know and leave the decision up to them.

It is advised you utilise an adept English speaking person to re-read your responses to ensure it is clear and concise (especially if you are not a native English speaker).