

A Recommendation You Can Stand Behind

**Turn Work You Witnessed into a
Specific, Credible Reference Letter**

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Start with the work you need to finish

A recommendation draft grounded in the working relationship and two specific observed examples, or a clear decision to decline.

This book is for managers and adult colleagues asked to recommend someone whose work they have actually observed.

Bring: The request, destination, deadline, relevant rules at your workplace and your own recollection or permitted records of the work.

The working method: Decide whether you can honestly recommend; state how you know the person; connect two observed work situations to the purpose of the letter.

Start with the four working sheets immediately after this introduction. They are part of the book, not an external download you must obtain. You can write on paper or copy the field labels into a document. The fictional worked example shows what a completed piece can look like; the reference sections explain choices and difficult cases. You do not have to finish the reference before making your first notes.

A useful first result is a filled brief: the real task, the available facts and the missing information. A blank field tells you what to find out. It is not permission to invent a detail. Completion takes your own checking and revision; this book does not promise a fixed time or control over someone else's response.

For workplace and adult graduate-applicant recommendations. Fictional examples. No hiring or admission guarantee; follow applicable confidentiality, reference and letterhead policies.

The named people and dialogue in the examples are fictional illustrations, not customer results. Their circumstances are not instructions to copy into your own situation. Treat strong rules of thumb as drafting defaults; the actual brief, recipient, privacy needs and applicable requirements take precedence.

Find the part you need

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Working sheet 1 — Accept, narrow or decline

1. Who is asking and what the recommendation is for

Your notes: _____

2. Recipient, deadline and submission channel

Your notes: _____

3. How I know the person and what I actually observed

Your notes: _____

4. Workplace rules or confidentiality limits to check

Your notes: _____

5. My decision and the scope I can honestly support

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 2 — Two observed work situations

1. Example one: situation and task

Your notes: _____

2. What the person did; what I directly witnessed

Your notes: _____

3. Relevant detail I can substantiate

Your notes: _____

4. Example two: a different situation, action and observation

Your notes: _____

5. Connection to the purpose of this recommendation

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 3 — The letter frame

1. Opening: my role, relationship, duration and recommendation

Your notes: _____

2. Body: first observed example and why it matters here

Your notes: _____

3. Body: second example without repeating the first

Your notes: _____

4. Close: scope of recommendation and any contact offer I can honour

Your notes: _____

5. Statements to remove because I did not observe them

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 4 — Before your name goes underneath

1. Relationship and dates verified

Your notes: _____

2. No copied achievement represented as my own observation

Your notes: _____

3. Recipient and submission rules checked

Your notes: _____

4. Permitted letterhead and capacity stated accurately

Your notes: _____

5. Final version retained in a permitted location

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

From three adjectives to one observed event

Everything in this example is fictional. Morgan managed Lee at a small distribution office. Lee is applying for an adult workplace role involving scheduling and exception handling.

The weak sentence is: “Lee is extremely reliable, detail-oriented and a natural leader.” Morgan may believe it, but the reader has no way to see the work behind it.

Worked draft — fictional:

Dear Selection Team,

I supervised Lee Patel as a scheduling assistant at our distribution office from March 2024 to July 2026. I recommend Lee for work involving schedule coordination and careful handling of exceptions.

During a delivery-system outage, Lee compared the affected jobs with the printed dispatch records, flagged the entries that could not be confirmed and prepared a list for the dispatcher to resolve. I reviewed that list with Lee. The useful part was the separation of confirmed information from assumptions; nobody had to guess which entries were safe to use.

In ordinary weekly work, Lee also kept a clear record of changed collection times and confirmed those changes with the relevant driver before updating the shared schedule. I observed that process directly during our weekly checks.

These examples are the basis of my recommendation. I would be glad to discuss the work I supervised if further detail would help.

Morgan Reed

The two examples cover an exception and routine work. The letter does not claim that Lee will succeed in every future job. Morgan's relationship to the work stays visible throughout.

If you did not supervise the person, use your actual relationship. If an achievement appears only on the résumé they sent, ask about it or leave it out; do not convert it into something you witnessed. A narrow, specific recommendation can be more honest than a broad one you cannot explain when someone calls.

Guide 1 — They asked

Deadline is a date

Night two. The message says *soon*. Soon is not a date. The message says *this week*. This week is a fog. The message says *whenever you can*. Whenever is how a Friday escapes the calendar and lands on you as a crisis at four.

You write back, if you are still in the ask and not yet in a no: *What is the deadline, as a date and a time and a timezone*. You do not apologise for asking. A date is the job of an ask. A person who cannot name a date has not finished asking.

You: *I do not want to sound difficult*. Me: *Difficult is a feeling you have about a calendar. A calendar is how a letter arrives. Sound like a person with a square*.

If they say Friday, you look at the square. You look at the rest of the week. You look at whether you know the work well enough to write by Friday without inventing a year. If the answer is no, the deadline did you a favour. Guide 2 is that favour used. If the answer is yes, you still need the packet. A Friday without a posting is a Friday spent guessing.

Jo's Friday is a date. She writes it on the calendar in the same pencil as the name. She does not write *letter* across three days as if the days were the craft. She writes Friday, 5 p.m., their timezone, and she writes the upload link if they sent one. If they did not send one, she asks. A letter emailed to them for them to upload is a different object from a letter you upload

yourself. Some rooms want you in the portal. Some rooms want a PDF on their desk. The ask should say which. If it does not, you are still in the ask.

A deadline that has already passed is not a cute emergency. It is information. You can still write if you know the work and the room will take a late page. You can decline because the date is gone and you will not wreck Thursday to invent a person. Both are allowed. Always-stay-up is a later chapter's refusal. Always-yes is this chapter's refusal. They rhyme. They are not a virtue.

You do not let them move the Friday three times in the same thread while you keep saying yes in your head. Each move is a new ask. Treat it as one. *I can do Friday as named. If the date moves, I may not be able to do the new one.* That sentence is a calendar. It is not a threat.

The packet

Night three. Résumé. Posting. Bullets. That is the packet. Not a novel. Not a link to their whole life. Three objects a tired recommender can use.

Résumé: so you do not invent a title they never held. So you can see the dates they claim. So you can match the years you actually saw against the years they printed. If the résumé says three years and you saw eight months, you have learned something the ask did not say. You write the eight months. You do not write the three years to be kind.

Posting: so you know who is reading. A graduate director is not a shop manager. A fellowship is not a

shift lead. The letter is still your mouth. The posting tells you which work to choose from the work you saw. It does not tell you to become a different person. If they did not send a posting, you ask. *Send the posting or the programme page.* If they cannot, you are writing into fog. Fog is how a first line becomes *To whom it may concern* by accident. Guide 3 will refuse that default. Tonight you refuse the fog at the ask.

Bullets: what they hope you will speak to. Bullets are a gift and a trap. A gift because memory is a sieve and a list can remind you of a Tuesday you actually lived. A trap because a list can become the letter if you are tired. You may use a bullet if it is a Tuesday you saw. You may not use a bullet you cannot stand in a room. If they send twelve, you will not write twelve. Two stories. Maybe three. The packet is not a shopping list you are obliged to finish.

You: *If I ask for a packet, I am already saying yes.*

Me: *You are saying you need objects. Objects are how a letter stays a letter. You can still decline after the packet arrives. The packet does not purchase a page.*

If they send a draft instead of a packet, you have a different night. Guide 8 is the draft. Tonight you can say: *Send the résumé, the posting, and a few bullets of work we actually did together. I will write in my own sentences, or I will tell you I cannot.* That is still the ask. That is not always-yes.

Jo asks for the packet on Tuesday afternoon. She names Friday. She does not start the blank page until the three objects are in the folder. If the packet is late, the Friday is allowed to die. A late packet is information. It is not a moral test you have to pass at

midnight.

A complete ask

Night five. This is what a complete ask looks like, not as a form, as a Tuesday.

They name the role or the programme. They name the deadline as a date, a time, a timezone. They say how the letter is delivered: email, portal, paper, a person with a title. They attach a résumé that is current. They attach or link a posting. They send a few bullets of work you actually shared. They remind you, briefly, of the years and the title, in case your memory is a sieve, which it is. They thank you without a hymn.

You can work with that. You still may say no. Completeness does not purchase a yes. Completeness makes a yes possible.

You write back: *I can do this. I will send by Friday. I will write my own sentences.* Or you write: *I cannot recommend you for this. I did not see enough of the work.* Both replies honour the completeness. A complete ask deserves a complete answer, not a silence that they have to decode on Thursday night.

Jo's complete ask arrives Wednesday morning. Résumé. Posting. Five bullets, two of which she actually saw. Deadline Friday 5 p.m. Portal link. She puts the two bullets she saw in the folder and leaves the other three in the message. She does not owe the three. She owes the two, if she says yes.

You: *That seems strict.* Me: *Strict is a feeling you have about a folder. A folder is how you avoid inventing. Inventing is how a name gets quoted as if you saw a*

year you did not.

If they send too much, a complete ask can still drown you. A forty-page packet is not kindness. It is a second job. You may say: *I will use the résumé, the posting, and what I remember. I will not read a novel to write a page.* That is still yes, if it is yes. It is a boundary around the object.

Guide 2 — Say no

Don't know them

Night one. You shared a corridor. You shared a large meeting. You shared a class of eighty and they sat near the aisle. You shared a group where someone else managed their work. You remember a face. You do not remember a Tuesday.

A face is not a recommendation.

Priya reads the message again. They say she changed their life. She does not remember the life. She remembers a polite nod. The gap between their sentence and her memory is the night. She will not fill the gap with *outstanding*. She will not fill it with a paste. She will close it with a no.

You: *I can write around what I don't know.* Me: *Writing around is how a letter becomes fog. Fog with a signature is still a signature. If you do not know them, you do not recommend them. You decline.*

How little is too little. You cannot make a statute of it. You can make a test. Can you name two stories of work you saw, with a time and a thing that happened, that a stranger could picture. If you cannot, you do not have a letter. You have a courtesy. Courtesy is a no that has not been said yet.

If you managed them for a month and the month was real, you may have two stories. A month can be a letter if the month was work. If you managed them for two years and you still cannot find a Tuesday, you have a different problem, and the no is still allowed. Duration

is not the same as sight. Sight is the job.

Priya did not manage them. She was on a panel with them once. She smiled in a photograph. The photograph is not a file. She declines.

No is a sentence

Night three. The sentence.

I am not able to write you a letter of recommendation. I did not work closely enough with you to speak to your work in a way that would help.

That is a no. It is not a novel. It does not list their failures. It does not list your workload as a moral display. It does not say *it is not you, it is me* as a joke. It does not offer a hymn in the same breath. It stops.

You may add, if it is true: *You will be better served by someone who saw the day-to-day work.* You may add, if it is true: *I need you to have this on Wednesday so you have time to ask someone else.* You may not add a paragraph about your own guilt. Guilt is a kitchen feeling. It does not belong on their screen.

You: *That feels cold.* Me: *Cold is a feeling you have about a short sentence. Short is how a no stays a no. Warmth that explains you into a yes is not warmth. It is a trap you built for Thursday.*

A professors' thread in May is full of people who have had to say this in a box. r/Professors, a night not a quote: a standard no to a request you cannot stand behind, and then the aggressive follow-up, they offer to write it, you only have to sign. That follow-up is a second ask. It is not a kindness. It is a bid to borrow

your mouth. Priya does not sign. You do not sign. A signature is not a courtesy. A signature is a claim that the sentences are yours.

If they send a draft with the no still ringing, you repeat the no. You do not edit the draft as a compromise. Editing is how a no becomes a thin letter with extra steps.

I cannot sign a letter I did not write, and I cannot write this one. Please ask someone who saw the work.

Two sentences. Then you stop. You do not enter a thread about fairness. Fairness is a long night. The letter is a short object.

Guide 3 — The first line

Who you are

Night one. Your name is already on the letterhead, or it is not, and then it must be in the first sentence. Your title. The organisation if the organisation is the room you shared with them. Who you are is not a biography. Who you are is the reason your name belongs on this file.

I am the operations manager at North & Pine, and I supervised Sam Ortega.

That sentence does a job. A stranger can put you on a map. A stranger can hear that you saw the work from a seat that sees work.

I am a big fan of talented people.

Dies. Fans do not recommend. Supervisors do. Colleagues do. Seminar leaders do, if the seminar was real and they were adults.

My name is Tessa Alderwick.

Dies as the whole art. They can see the name. The name without the seat is a handshake in a dark room.

If you have two titles, pick the one that names the relationship. If you used to be their manager and now you are in a different shop, say both in one breath: *I managed Sam Ortega for two years at North & Pine, where I was operations manager; I now work elsewhere, and I am still glad to recommend them.* The elsewhere does not steal the years. The years are the job.

You: *I do not want to sound like I am bragging about my title.* Me: *Title is not a brag. Title is a map. A map is how a stranger believes you saw the work.*

If you were a colleague, not a manager, say colleague. Do not upgrade yourself in line one. Upgrade is how a file becomes an argument when they call. *I worked alongside Sam Ortega as a coordinator on the same desk.* Alongside is honest. Honest lives.

If you were a seminar leader for adult graduate applicants, say that. Do not say *teacher* as if a schoolchild were in the file. This spine does not put a schoolchild in the file.

How long

Night two. Duration is a number a stranger can hold. Two years. Eight months. One semester. A project from March to November. Do not write *for some time*. Some time is fog. Do not write *for many years* if the many is two. Two is enough if two is true. Two is a lie if the two is eight months.

Open the résumé. Open your own calendar if you have to. Match the dates. If they printed three years and you saw eight months, the first line takes your eight months. You may say you are speaking only to the period you saw. That sentence is craft. It is not a smear. Guide 6 will sit with what you did not see. Tonight the first line only has to avoid inventing a year.

who reported to me for two years as a coordinator
lives.

who has been with us forever

dies.

who I have known since they were young

dies, and it dies twice if young means a child. Adult recommended person. Adult years.

Jo writes *I have managed Sam Ortega since March 2024 in the coordinator role*. She does not write *I have had the pleasure of knowing Sam for years* because the years are a smear of months she has not counted. She counts. Counting is the first line's job.

If the duration is a single project, name the project and the span. A project can be a letter if you saw the work. A project named as a friendship cannot.

You: *I do not remember the month*. Me: *Look it up before you type. Memory is a sieve. The first line is not a sieve. The first line is a date range you can stand in a room*.

If you cannot find the month, you may write the year you are sure of. If you cannot find the year, you are back in Guide 2. A first line with no duration is a first line that forgot the job.

That you recommend

Night three. Say it. Do not hide it in the last paragraph as a prize for the reader who survived a hymn. The reader may not survive. Put the recommendation in the first lines, with who you are and how long.

I recommend Sam Ortega for the coordinator role at the shop named in their materials.

lives.

I recommend Sam Ortega without reservation.

can live if it is true. If you have reservations, do not write without reservation. Write the recommendation you actually have, or go back to Guide 2. Secret reservations in a glowing first line are how phone calls become ugly. Guide 13 is the phone. Tonight, do not plant a lie the phone will have to harvest.

I am happy to provide this reference.

weak. Happy is a mood. Recommend is a verb. Use the verb.

I cannot recommend more highly.

a riddle. Can you recommend, or can you not. Say you recommend. Leave the puzzle book in the kit aisle.

If you are writing, you recommend. If you do not recommend, you are in the wrong chapter. A letter that spends a page avoiding the verb is a thin letter in a better suit. Priya already left. Do not imitate her no with a page. Imitate her no with a no.

Wes, later, will have a box with a character limit. Even in a box, the first lines still want the verb. Stars are not the verb. A box that only wants stars is a database. If they also want text, the text still recommends.

You: *It feels early to say it.* Me: *It is a recommendation letter. Early is on time. Late is a hymn that forgot its job.*

Guide 4 — Relationship is the job

Title, duration, context

You write the line you can stand.

I am the night manager of the east desk. They reported to me from March 2023 to January 2026 as a shift lead on that desk.

Title: yours, and theirs. Duration: months that have numbers. Context: a desk a stranger can see. That is the whole craft of the opening. Not a personality. A map.

You try the other line, the one a sample offered.

I have had the pleasure of knowing this remarkable individual for many years, and I can say without hesitation that they are one of the finest people I have ever worked with.

You read it aloud to the empty office. You cannot see a desk. You cannot see a year. You cannot see work. You can see a person who did not want to be unkind.

Unkind is not the danger. Fog is the danger. Fog is how a reader learns that you are willing to put your name on a feeling. Feelings do not file. Titles file. Dates file. A room files.

You: *It sounds cold with the titles.* Me: *Cold is a feeling you are having. The paragraph is a relationship. Relationships have names and lengths. Names and lengths are not cold. They are true.*

If they were a contractor, you say contractor. If they were a colleague on a neighbouring team, you say neighbouring team. If they sat three floors away and you shared a weekly call, you say the call. Do not upgrade the furniture because the posting wants a supervisor. The posting is their problem. Your name is yours.

A reader who has fifty folders will use your first paragraph as a filter. Not a moral filter. A practical one. Can this person see the work. If the first paragraph cannot answer, they may still be kind about the rest. Kindness is not the same as weight. Weight lives in a reporting line, a year, a project, a Tuesday you will write later. Tonight you only owe the map.

You were not the manager

Wednesday. A different folder. They asked you because the manager will not write, or the manager left, or the manager is the reason they are leaving, or they liked you more. Liking you more is not a reporting line.

You write the true furniture.

I was a senior analyst on the same desk. We were peers from September 2024 to April 2026. I did not manage their work. I sat next to it. I saw the Tuesday tickets, the client notes, the way the queue looked at 16:00.

That letter can live. It is smaller than a manager's letter. Smaller is honest. Honest is the job. A reader would rather have a peer who saw the tickets than a fake supervisor who saw a lunch.

You try the upgrade because they asked.

Although I was not their direct manager, I worked closely with them in a supervisory capacity.

Supervisory capacity is fog. You were not their supervisor. Do not rent the word. If you trained them on a tool, say the tool and the month. If you reviewed their drafts, say the drafts. Training is not managing. Reviewing is not hiring and firing. Words have jobs. Let them keep their jobs.

You: They need a supervisor letter. The posting says supervisor. Me: Then they need to ask a supervisor. You are not a costume they get to put on a file. If no supervisor will write, that is information. You do not repair it by lying about furniture.

A skip-level is a real relationship if it is real. *They were on my skip-level. I saw them in the Monday review for fourteen months. I did not assign their tasks. I did see the work they brought to that room. Fourteen months. Monday review. Tasks you did not assign. A reader can use that. A reader cannot use I oversaw their development.* Development is a brochure.

Client. Vendor. Partner on a shared project. All of these can be letters if you saw the work. All of these die if you pretend you sat in their 1:1. You did not sit in their 1:1. Write the room you sat in.

A conference acquaintance is not this chapter. A conference acquaintance is Priya's night, and Priya's night is a no. Do not drag a badge-and-drink into a first paragraph and call it context. Context is a desk. A drink is a drink.

Guide 5 — Two stories, not a résumé dump

What a story is

A story in this file is small. It is not a hero's journey. It is not a parable. It is a day, a problem, what they did, and that you saw it.

Day: a Tuesday, a close, a quarter-end, a morning the system was down. Problem: the thing that would have broken without a person. What they did: verbs that belong to a body in a room, not to a brochure. That you saw it: your eyes, not the floor's legend.

On a Tuesday in November the vendor file arrived corrupt. They rebuilt it from the stubs and had a clean version in the queue before the 9:00. I was on the call. I saw the stubs and the clean file.

That is a story. It has weather (Tuesday, a corrupt file). It has work. It has you.

Compare:

They are extremely reliable, detail-oriented, and able to work independently under pressure.

Three adjectives. No Tuesday. Under pressure is a mood. Independently is a hope. Detail-oriented is a phrase that has been on every form since carbon paper. You can believe all three and still have failed to write a letter.

A story can be short. Short is not the enemy. Fog is the enemy. Two sentences can be a story if a day is in

them. A page can fail to be a story if no day is in it.

You: I don't remember a Tuesday that clean. Me: Then remember a mess. Letters do not require a triumph. They require a person doing work you saw. A messy Tuesday they handled is better than a clean adjective. If you cannot remember even a mess, you may be in Priya's folder.

Do not invent a Tuesday to have a story. Invention is Guide 6's crime in a different coat. If you half-remember, look. Old email. Old ticket. A calendar. If looking returns a day, write the day. If looking returns a vibe, do not write the vibe as a day.

The story is not a scene from a novel. You do not need dialogue. You do not need what they were wearing. You need the work. If you find yourself writing their childhood, you have left the file. If you find yourself writing their future, you have left the file. Stay on a day that already happened, in a room you were in.

Two, not twelve

You have six Tuesdays. You want to be generous. You write all six. The letter becomes a list. The list is their résumé in paragraph form. A tired reader will skim the list the way they skim a CV, and they will not remember a door or a stub or a 9:00. Two stories sit in a memory. Twelve stories sit in a pile.

Pick the two that a stranger could use. One that shows how they handle a break. One that shows how they handle ordinary work, if ordinary work is the job. Do not pick two theatrical nights and skip the desk they actually sat at. Theatrical nights make a legend.

Legends are hard to phone. Ordinary Tuesdays phone well. Guide 13 will sit with the phone. Tonight you pick stories you could repeat without growing them.

If the posting is for a people-manager and you saw them manage a close, one story can be the close. If the posting is for a quiet specialist and you saw them rebuild a file, one story can be the file. You are not their cover letter. You do not have to cover every requirement. You have to be true about two days.

You: *They asked me to mention the award and the bilingual work and the committee.* Me: *Awards live on résumés. Committees live on résumés. If you saw the bilingual Tuesday, write that Tuesday. If you only saw a certificate, the certificate can stay on their list. You are not a display case.*

A third story can live if it is short and different. A third that is the first again, with a new adjective, dies. Different means a different problem, not a different compliment.

Stop when a tired person has two pictures. Stopping is craft. Exhausting the folder is anxiety.

The Tuesday test

Read paragraph two aloud. If there is no day in it, it is an adjective. Days can be named as Tuesday, or as the March close, or as the morning the system was down. A season is weaker. *During their time with us* is not a day. *Over the years* is not a day. *On more than one occasion* is a lawyer's fog. Give a date or a weekday or a named close.

If the paragraph could be lifted onto another person's file without changing a fact, it fails the test. *They always go the extra mile* lifts. *They rebuilt the vendor file from the stubs before 9:00* does not lift, not unless the other person also rebuilt that file, which they did not.

The extra mile is a graveyard. So is *above and beyond*. So is *hits the ground running*. So is *wears many hats*. So is *a self-starter*. You may have meant them. Meaning is not a picture. Write the mile if there was a mile: the hour, the problem, the thing they did. Then you do not need the proverb.

You: *Without the proverb it sounds like I don't rate them*. Me: *Rating is a later night, and even then it is an assessment, not a slogan. Two pictures rate a person better than a proverb. Proverbs are how you sound like a template. Templates are how a reader stops believing your name*.

Wes will meet a box with a character limit. The Tuesday test still holds in a box. Shorter stories, still with a day. A box full of adjectives is a box full of nothing. Wes is craft, a composite, a person who has to fit a letter into a portal. He does not get a different physics. He gets a shorter stick. Two days, cut to the bone. Not twelve adjectives cut to the bone. Cutting adjectives does not produce a day.

Guide 6 — What you did not see

Scope is a perimeter

You saw the reports. You did not sit on the client calls. You saw the close. You did not see the hiring they did on another floor. You saw the adult seminar on Wednesday nights. You did not see the lab. Perimeters are a kind of truth. Readers can use them. Readers cannot use a voice that sounds like it sat everywhere.

I can speak to their work on the east desk from March to January. I cannot speak to their client portfolio. I did not join those calls.

That paragraph is a doorframe. It makes the stories in Guide 5 stronger, because the reader now knows where your eyes were. A letter that pretends to have seen a portfolio you never saw will lose the east desk too, once a question lands.

You: A perimeter looks like I am damning them with faint coverage. Me: Coverage is a fact. Faint is a tone. You can write a perimeter in a flat voice. I did not see X. I did see Y. Then Y gets the Tuesdays. The reader is an adult. Adults understand that one person does not see a whole career.

Scope includes the work after they left you. They have been gone two years. They have a new tool, a new title, a new shop. You do not speak to the new shop. You may say they left your desk with a documented close, if that is true. You may not say they are thriving at the new place unless you saw the new place, and you did

not. Thriving is a greeting-card verb. Greeting cards are not this file.

Scope includes the work before they arrived. Their résumé has a glowing decade. The decade is not yours. Do not adopt it with *they brought a wealth of experience*. Wealth of experience is fog that smuggles a decade you did not watch. If you saw them use an old skill on your Tuesday, you write the Tuesday. The old skill can be named as a thing they used, not as a career you vouch for.

A professor of an adult student has a seminar perimeter. You saw the papers, the questions, the Wednesday nights. You did not see their workplace unless you did. Do not write a workplace you visited only in their anecdotes. Anecdotes from them are their cover letter, not your eyes. Graduate nights have a later chapter, with a US record word named as a night. Tonight the job is the same for a manager and a teacher of adults: say the room you were in. Leave the rooms you were not.

Mixed record

You saw good Tuesdays and a bad one. The bad one is real. It is not a reason to write a novel, and it is not a reason to pretend the good Tuesdays did not happen.

Assessment, not smear. Smear as entertainment is this chapter's second crime. The first is the invented year. They are related. Both are ways of writing past your eyes: one toward a hymn, one toward a roast. The file will not hold either.

If the bad Tuesday is the reason you should not recommend, you decline. You do not write a letter that is a trap, a faint praise with a knife in paragraph three, a line you can later point at and say *I was honest*. Honesty that is a trap is a performance of virtue. Performance belongs on a stage. If you cannot recommend, Guide 2 explains a concise refusal and the working brief helps you state the limits of what you observed. You do not owe the hiring desk a roast they did not ask you to cook.

If you can recommend the work despite a miss you saw, you may name the miss only if it is work, not gossip, and only if you can name it without enjoying it. *They missed a close in April. They wrote the correction the next morning and the next three closes held. I was there for all four.* That is an assessment. *They famously blew the April close, you should have seen the floor,* is a story for a pub. Pubs are not letterhead.

You: *If I omit the miss, I'm lying.* Me: *A letter is not a complete personnel file. It is work you are willing to put your name on. If the miss is disqualifying, you decline. If it is not, you are not required to centre it. You are required not to invent its opposite. Do not write always if there was an April. Do not write a roast if April was a close they repaired.*

A mixed record is also a temptation to rank them against someone else on your team. Ranking two people for the same job is a later night. Tonight you do not sink one person to lift another, and you do not sink them for sport. Sport is entertainment. Entertainment dies here.

Guide 7 — Friday

Packet late

They were supposed to send the résumé, the posting, and a few bullets of Tuesdays they hoped you remembered. The packet is the difference between a letter and a guess. Guide 1 named it. This chapter lives in the hole where the packet is not.

Friday 9:12. Still nothing. You ping once. *I still need the posting and the résumé if you want a letter today. If they do not arrive this morning I will not be able to send.* That is a sentence. It is not a novel. It is not a scold. It is a clock.

If the packet arrives at 11:00, you may still have a Friday. You read. You check titles and dates against your memory. You write the two stories you already had, or you discover you do not have them. Discovery at 11:00 is allowed to become a no at 11:20. A packet does not obligate you. A packet informs you. If it informs you that you were wrong to say yes, you unsay the yes. Late is not a trap that forces a hymn.

If the packet arrives at 16:40, you are in a different night. You have a meeting at 15:00, or a desk, or a life. You do not owe a miracle between 16:40 and 17:00. You can say: *This arrived too late for a letter I can stand. I can send on Monday if the date can move. If it cannot, I will have to decline.* Monday is not always possible. Portals close. If the date cannot move, the answer is no. No on Friday afternoon is still a complete sentence.

You: They'll think I punished them for being late. Me: Late is a fact of their packet. A thin letter is a fact of your name. You are not a parent giving a lesson. You are a person who needs a posting and two Tuesdays. Without them you guess. Guessing is Guide 6's invented year in a hurry.

A packet that is only a résumé, no posting, is a half packet. You can write from the desk you shared without a posting. You cannot match a posting you have not seen, and you should not try. If they needed you to speak to a role you do not understand, the missing posting is a reason to wait or to decline, not a reason to invent a fit.

A packet that is a novel is the other problem. Twelve pages of self-review, a career manifesto, a paste of every bullet. You do not owe the novel a reading that eats Friday. You take titles, dates, the posting, and anything that wakes a Tuesday. You leave the manifesto. Guide 5 already refused the dump. Friday does not revive it.

Decline still allowed

You said yes on Tuesday. Friday you know you cannot. The yes was not a contract written in blood. The yes was an intention. Intentions can meet a packet that never arrived, a week that broke, a memory that will not return two Tuesdays, a perimeter you had pretended was wider. You decline.

I know I said yes. I cannot write a letter I can stand by today's date. I have to withdraw. I am sorry for the late no.

That is the whole message. You do not write a novel of your week. You do not write a prosecution of their late packet, even if the packet was late. You do not offer a hymn as a consolation prize. Consolation hymns are still letters. Guide 2 sat with no. Friday no is the same no with a clock in the room. The clock does not make you cruel. The clock makes you late. Late no is worse than early no, and still better than a false yes that lands in a portal at 16:58.

You: They'll miss the committee. Me: They might. That is a cost of a late packet, or of your late clarity, or of both. You cannot buy them the committee with a page you do not mean. If you could write it, you would. You cannot. Say that. Stop.

If you can write it on Monday and they can still use Monday, you offer Monday. You do not offer Monday as a way of not saying no while the portal closes tonight. Offer only a date that is real. A fake Monday is a second circle they will ink, and you will be here again, meaner.

Priya's Friday is a no she should have sent on Monday. She is craft. She said maybe in a hallway. She hoped the packet would magically contain a relationship. The packet arrived Thursday, a résumé she does not recognise, a posting far from any desk she sat at. Friday she sends the no. She is late. She is still right. Late and right outweigh on-time and false. She does not stay up to manufacture two Tuesdays from a gym and a Christmas party.

Guide 8 — They wrote it for you to sign

Draft can start

You may use it.

Use means: you take a date you had forgotten, a project name, a Tuesday that wakes. You put those facts on a page you write. You throw away their adjectives. You throw away their year if the year is wrong. You throw away *outstanding individual* and *any role* and *without reservation* unless those sentences are true in your mouth, which they often are not.

A starting draft is a cousin of the packet. Résumé, posting, bullets, and sometimes sentences. Sentences are more dangerous than bullets because they already look like a letter. You have to unlook them. Print their draft. Put a pen through every line you could not say. What remains, if anything, is a pile of facts. Facts can move to your page. Lines cannot move without passing through your mouth.

You: *If I rewrite it, isn't it still theirs?* Me: *If every sentence is one you can stand, and the relationship is true, and the Tuesdays are ones you saw, it is yours, even if a fact began in their draft. If you change company and date and leave the hymn, it is still theirs. The test is the closed door, not the track changes.*

Asking for a draft can be a way of saying yes while also saying *help my memory*. That ask is allowed if you are honest about what you will do with it. Tell them: *Send*

me dates and two Tuesdays I was in the room for. I will not sign a letter you wrote. I will write my own. If I cannot, I will decline. Then they know. Then a LOR_final_for_your_signature is a miss on their side, and you can point at the instruction you already gave.

If you did not tell them, you still do not have to sign. Silence is not a contract for a rubber stamp. You can say now what you would have said at the ask.

Your mouth

Every sentence has to fit.

Read the page aloud. If you hear their cover letter in third person, you have the neighbour spine in the room. *They are excited to bring their passion to your mission.* Passion and mission are applicant words. You are not the applicant. One line, then leave that book. Cut the mission. Write a Tuesday.

If you hear a generator, they can hear it too. *Throughout their tenure they consistently demonstrated the ability to hit the ground running in a fast-paced environment.* Tenure. Consistently demonstrated. Hit the ground running. Fast-paced. Four costumes. Delete the sentence. If nothing remains of that paragraph, the paragraph was a costume chest. You do not owe it a rewrite. You owe two stories from Guide 5, in your own short sentences.

If you hear a hymn you would not say to their face in a 1:1, you will not survive a phone call. The phone will ask you to say it again. Say now, with the door closed, or cut.

Your mouth includes your perimeter. If their draft has you sitting on client calls you did not sit on, you take yourself off those calls. If it has you measuring 40 percent, you take the number out unless you measured it. If it has you using a first name for a hiring person you do not know, you put a title or a department or a *to whom* only if you truly have no name, and Guide 3 already sat with that. Do not let their draft choose a false intimacy with a stranger.

You: Rewriting will take as long as writing. Me: Then write. The draft has already cost you the minutes you spent finding the five wrong places. You do not have to spend more minutes making their page look like yours. A blank page and two Tuesdays is often faster than a fight with their adjectives.

If rewriting is longer than you have before Friday, you are in Guide 7. Decline, or write your short true page, or both in that order. Do not sign at 16:58 because their draft was ready and you were not. Ready is not a virtue when the ready thing is someone else's hymn.

Verbatim rubber stamp

You sign their page. You send it. You do not read past the first warmth. This is the death the chapter is named for.

A rubber stamp is visible. Readers have learned the sound of a letter the candidate wrote. The adjectives are a little too useful. The stories are a little too complete. The year is a little too round. The close recommends them for any role in any shop on any earth. Your name sits under a voice that is not how you

talk. People who have read you, if they have, will know. People who have not will still know something is off, the way you know a resignation that thanked a room it could not stay in. Different spine. Same ear.

Some readers will not care. Some rooms are a pile, and a stamp gets them through a screen. Through a screen is not this book's promise. This book will not tell you the stamp gets them the job. It will tell you the stamp puts your name on a page you did not write. That is the whole harm, and it is enough. You have to live with the name. They have to live with a file that may be read next to a phone call you cannot take in their voice.

A rubber stamp with small edits is still a stamp if the bones are theirs and the hymn is theirs and you only fixed a comma. Track changes that alter *colour* to *color* are not a mouth. A mouth changes the year, the title, the story, the close, the letterhead, and the offer of a phone.

You: Everyone signs drafts. Me: Everyone is the same sentence that told Jo to copy the bullets. Everyone is how names get light. You can be a person whose name is still heavy. Heavy is not a personality. Heavy is a door you use: I do not sign letters I did not write.

If they already sent their draft to the portal under your name, you have a different fire. You write to them, and to the portal if you have a door, that the letter on file is not yours. You send yours, or you send a withdrawal. You keep copies. You do not let embarrassment make you ratify a page you found out about on Thursday. Embarrassment is a kitchen. The file is a year.

Guide 9 — Letterhead, email, portal

Letterhead is a claim

A heading is not decoration. A heading is a claim that the company is in the room with you. Logo, address, sometimes a registration line at the foot. The page looks like a document the shop would send a client. That is the point, and that is the danger.

If the company lets you write on letterhead, you use it because it locates you. Date of the letter. Your title. How to reach you. The heading does the locating so the first sentence can do the recommending. You do not add a second heading in the body. You do not put the logo on page two as a stamp. One mark at the top. Then the work you saw.

If the company forbids letters on letterhead, you do not steal the mark. You do not open the Word template you were given for client quotes and type *To whom it may concern* under a brand that did not agree to stand behind this file. Theft of a heading is not professionalism. It is a claim the shop did not authorise.

You: Everyone does it. It looks more real. Me: Real is a relationship you can name and a number you will pick up. A stolen mark looks real until someone in the receiving room calls the number on the heading and the receptionist has no idea you wrote a letter.

Print a sample. Look at it with the door closed. If you would not walk that page into your own HR and say *I*

sent this, do not send it. The mark is not a costume. The mark is their name.

A PDF exported from a slide deck with the logo in the corner is still letterhead. A scan of an old compliment slip glued under your signature is still letterhead. A signature block that includes the logo as an image is still letterhead. The format does not save you. The policy does, or it does not.

When the heading is forbidden

Some shops will not let you put their name on a recommendation. The handbook says employment verifications go through HR. Managers may not issue letters. The brand is not a stationery cupboard. That policy is a night, not a dare.

You still may recommend, in a great many rooms, as a person who saw the work. You do it from an address that is yours. You say, in the first lines, who you were in relation to them, for how long, in what shop, and that you are writing in a personal capacity. Personal capacity is not a magic phrase. It is a true location. You were their manager. You are not the company speaking. Both can be true on the same page.

You: Then the letter is weaker. Me: A letter with a stolen heading is weaker the moment they check. A letter from your own address, with a title you held and years you can count, is a letter. Weak is a story you did not see. Weak is not the absence of a logo.

If the policy is that you may not write at all, that is Guide 10. Tonight is only the heading. Do not confuse a stationery rule with a silence rule. Read the sentence in

the handbook. Stationery is paper. Silence is a different door.

You take the company sheet out of the tray. You put it in the recycling, or you put it back in the cupboard, because wasting paper is not a personality either. You open a blank document. Your name at the top. Your city if a city helps them find you. Your personal email. Your phone. Date. Then the first line that already exists from an earlier chapter: who you are, how long, that you recommend, if you do.

The blank page looks naked. Naked is honest. Honest is allowed to look like a person wrote it, because a person did.

The portal is a box

Wednesday. They sent a link. *Please complete the recommendation by Friday 17:00.* A spinner. A login you have to create. A password the page will forget. Fields: relationship, years known, a rating as stars or a dropdown, a box for comments with a counter in the corner, a checkbox that you are willing to be contacted. Submit. Then a page that says thank you and does not let you download what you typed.

The portal is a box. It is not a conversation. It does not want your letterhead. It does not want a PDF unless there is an upload control, and even then the upload control is a mouth the size of a mouth, not a second personality. You fill the box like an adult, or you leave a hole they will call incomplete, and your name will sit on a file that has a blank where the stories should have been.

You pick the relationship that matches the work you saw. You do not upgrade yourself to advisor because the dropdown offered advisor and advisor sounded heavier. You do not pick *friend* because you also had lunch. Friend is a different night. The box is asking how you know the work.

You type the years you can count. You do not type a range you have not looked at. You do not type *several years* because the field wanted a number and you were tired. Several is how a later call goes wrong.

Stars are a different object from sentences. A five without a story is a click. A story without a rating still has to live in this shop's dashboard. You do not give a five because you are afraid a four will be read as a no. You give the rating you would repeat on a phone. If you cannot give a rating you would repeat, you should not be in the box. Guide 2 already sat with no. The box does not get a mercy five because a counter is ticking.

Comments is not the speech you did not give in a farewell. Comments is two stories, or three, cut to the counter. If the counter is small, you keep the stories and you cut the greeting. You cut *it is a pleasure to recommend*. You keep the Tuesday they ran the room when the vendor failed. You keep the line that you will take a call. A greeting does not travel in three thousand characters. A story does, if you let it.

Screenshot the confirmation. The screen that says submitted. The time. The name of the applicant as the portal spelled it. Save it with the PDF you would have sent if they had wanted a PDF. Portals time out. Portals show a different rating after a refresh. Portals eat the last paragraph and still say thank you. The screenshot

is how you notice.

You: *I already have a beautiful letter. Why the box.*

Me: *Because they built a box. You can hate the box and still fill it. Hating it in the comments field is a speech. Fill, screenshot, stop.*

If the portal will not accept a past date for when you worked with them, or will not let you submit without a five, you take a screenshot of the refusal. You send the PDF to the address in the instructions, if there is one. You do not lie to a dropdown because a dropdown is poorly built. A lie in a dropdown is still a lie on their file, with your name on it.

Guide 10 — Dates and title only

The letter may not be allowed

Some shops will confirm dates and title, and will also let a manager write a personal letter. Some shops will confirm dates and title, and will treat any other page as a breach. Some shops are silent until you ask, and then the silence is a no. You ask. You do not guess in their favour because guessing in their favour is how your name ends up on a page the shop will not stand behind, and how their name ends up attached to a problem you created.

If the answer is no, the answer is no. You do not write anyway after hours from a personal address while still using your current title as if the title were a loophole. Title as location is true. Title as a way to smuggle a company voice out the side door is not personal capacity. It is a costume.

If the answer is *ask HR and wait*, you wait, or you decline because the deadline will not wait. Guide 7 already sat with Friday. A policy that takes two weeks to answer is a policy that has already answered you for this packet. You tell the applicant the timeline. You do not sit on the ask as if your good intentions were a letter.

Priya, later, will decline because she does not know them. Tonight the decline can be the policy, even if you know them well. *I am not allowed to write letters for the shop. HR will confirm dates and title. I am sorry I*

cannot do more on paper. That is a complete night. It is not a novel. It is not a smear. It is a door.

You: *I will write it and not put it on letterhead. No one will know.* Me: *You will know. HR will know if they are called. The receiving room may know when they ring the number you listed as work. Hidden is not allowed. Hidden is only hidden until it is not.*

Personal capacity, if it is real

Personal capacity is a true location or it is a lie. True: you saw the work, you are willing to say so as yourself, the shop has not forbidden you to speak as yourself, and the page does not wear their mark. Lie: you are doing the shop's voice from a Gmail address because the printout annoyed you.

If it is true, you write as Guide 9 already told you. Your name. Your personal email. Your phone. The years. The title you held. *I am writing as her former manager, in a personal capacity, not on behalf of the company.* Then the two stories. Then a close you can pick up. You do not spend the first page on the policy. The policy is a sentence. The stories are the letter.

If it is not true, you do not write. You point at HR. You offer, if you can stand it, to be a person on a phone if a phone is allowed, and you check that too, because some shops have closed the phone as well as the paper. You do not invent a third object, a "character note," a Slack voice memo, a LinkedIn click, to beat a policy you dislike. Beating a policy is not this spine. This spine is a letter you are allowed to send, or a no.

Jo is craft. Composite. Not proof. She wanted to write. She had two stories from a year of Tuesdays. HR said dates and title only, and no personal letters while you are employed. She told the applicant on Wednesday morning. The applicant still had Thursday to ask someone else. Jo did not write at 23:10 as a secret friend. She confirmed, when the applicant asked what HR would say, that the dates were the dates and the title was the title, and that she would not add a story on the shop's paper. The applicant was not grateful. Gratitude is not the craft. Time to ask someone else is the craft.

Guide 11 — Graduate, not schoolchild

You are not the advisor if you are not the advisor

Graduate rooms have a hierarchy they do not always confess. The advisor's letter is one object. Yours, if you are a committee member, a manager, a collaborator, a former supervisor in a shop, is another. Do not write as if you were the advisor. Do not overhype to make up for not being the advisor. Do not pretend you saw the thesis if you saw a course, or a job, or a summer.

Academic writers who care about this have said the useful thing without needing a lecture from me: specific examples, no overhype, do not take the advisor's chair if you are not in it. I will not hang an author-year on that. I will put it on the desk. If you taught them one module, you are the person who taught one module. If you managed them in a shop, you are the manager. The committee can tell when you have borrowed a throne.

You: They need a big name. I should sound bigger.

Me: You should sound like the room you were in. Big is a story you did not see. Big dies. Specific lives.

If they already have the advisor, and they asked you for a second letter about work in your shop, you write the shop. You do not repeat the thesis. You do not guess the thesis. You do not say they are the best student you have known if you have not known them as a student. Superlatives without a room are overhype in a coat.

Two stories from the shop are the job.

If you are the advisor, you still do not overhype. You still use Tuesdays. You still name what you did not see. Advisor is a location, not a licence to write a hymn.

The packet they owe you

They send a CV, the statement, the program, the date, the link, the spelling of the address. If they send a smile and a link only, you may ask for the packet. You may decline if the packet does not come. A graduate letter written from a smile is a guess. Guesses die in committees that have fifty files.

You do not write the statement for them. You are not the applicant. A neighbour spine is the cover letter, and it is not this book. You do not rewrite their CV as your second paragraph. Guide 5 already sat with two stories, not a résumé dump. Graduate readers have the CV. They do not have your Tuesday.

If they send a draft of your letter, Guide 8. A starting draft can live if you revise it into your mouth. A verbatim signature dies. Some graduate rooms forbid candidate-drafted letters. Check the instructions. If the room forbids it, you refuse the draft and you write, or you decline. You do not sign their hymn because a portal is due at midnight.

Wes, who lives in boxes, will do a graduate portal the way he does a hiring portal: cut to the counter, keep the stories, screenshot, PDF if an upload exists, no second spray. The waiver will sit at the top of the form, already ticked or not. He will not change his stories because of the tick. He will change his stories only if he

did not see the work. He did see the work. He writes.

Guide 12 — Two people, one job

Two folders, two asks

Open the first folder. CV, posting, a note in their handwriting or a clean email: *I know you might be asked about [the other name]. I still hope you can write.* Open the second folder. Same posting. A note that does not mention the first name, or a note that does. You do not owe either of them a report on the other. You owe each of them a decision: yes, no, or a letter that is an assessment of their work.

You: *If I write both, I am lying to one of them.* Me: *If you write both as assessments of work you saw, you are doing the job twice. If you write both as a contest, you have made a third job no one posted. If you cannot stand to write one of them, that is a no, and the no belongs to that folder, not to a ranking.*

You may tell each of them that the other has asked, if that is true and if you can say it without turning the week into sport. You may not tell either of them what you will write about the other. You may not show either of them the other letter. You may not use one packet to thicken the other. Two files. Two mouths, both yours, both limited to what you saw in that file's person.

If the shop that is hiring asks you, in one call, to compare them, that is a different object, and it comes later in this chapter. It is not the default. The default is two letters, or one letter and one no, or two nos. Default is not a ranking.

Put the posting back between the folders. The posting is one job. The letters are two people. Do not let the posting force the letters into a single page with two names on it. A single page with two names is a ranking even if you do not use numbers.

Assessment is a person, not a race

An assessment says: I was her manager for two years. I saw this Tuesday. I saw that quarter. I did not see the client work. I recommend her for this posting, if you do, with the scope named. It does not say: she is better than him. It does not say: he is the runner-up. It does not say: if you can only take one, take her. Those sentences are rankings. Rankings are for the night when one is clearly stronger and you have been asked, in a room, to say so. They are not for the default page.

You will feel the pull to rank anyway. The posting is one. Your time is one. Your loyalty feels like one. Loyalty is not a letter. Two Tuesdays can both be true. Two people can both have done work you would recommend. The hiring room will rank. That is their job. Your job is not to do their job in advance in a sentence that will follow the person you ranked lower for years.

You: They will know I wrote both. They will compare the adjectives. Me: Then do not use adjectives as a code. Use stories. If the stories are true, they will not be twins, because the Tuesdays were not twins. Difference is not a ranking. Difference is two lives. Code is how you try to rank without ranking. Code dies when a tired reader misses it, and it dies when a careful reader sees it and hates you for the slyness.

A letter with three superlatives and a letter with none is a ranking by font. If you do not mean a ranking, do not write a hymn for one and a glass of water for the other. Write two assessments. If one of them does not deserve a letter you can stand behind, that is a no, said to that person, not a quiet thin page.

Thin pages as a private no are sabotage. Sabotage is the next heading. Do not skip it because you like one of them more.

Guide 13 — Phone after the letter

keep a copy

The portal said *submitted*. The banner was green. You closed the laptop. You felt adult. You were empty-handed.

May, the call. You have no PDF. Hart's drive has a folder called RECS that you no longer see because you changed jobs in April. Sent mail is on a server you do not own. Nia has a copy, maybe, if the instructions allowed her to see it, and maybe not, if she waived, and you are not going to ask Nia to forward you your own sentences while Rowe is on the line.

Before you send, you save. The objects are ordinary:

- the letter, as you wrote it, PDF, your name, their name, the date of the page
- the email, if there was an email, saved or printed to PDF
- the screenshot of the portal fields and the confirmation, if there was a portal
- the paper, if there was paper, photographed before it left the table

A folder you own:

rec_Nia_Hart_March/

A filename you can find in a year:

Nia_recommendation_Hart_12-March.pdf

You BCC yourself if the send is mail. You wait until the personal inbox shows it. You open the attachment on the phone. You check that the two stories are the two stories. Then you may close the lid.

You: This feels like I don't trust Nia.

Me: You are not on trial for trust. You are keeping a page with your name on it. Rowe will have that page. You should too.

Do not BCC Nia as a courtesy copy if the instructions said the letter is confidential. Do not BCC a friend. Do not BCC the shop you are recommending her to, as a second send. The BCC is you. One address you hold. Then stop.

If the work mail forbids BCC, you send, then you forward the Sent item to yourself before you stand up. Forward is late if you forget. BCC travels with the send. Prefer the act that is in the same click.

If you are writing on letterhead they forbid you to use from a personal address, you already had that chapter. This chapter only adds: whatever address you sent from, the copy lives in a folder that is yours. Letterhead is an object. The copy is a second object. Hide neither. Lose neither.

the last line is a promise

You wrote, because a sample had it, and because it felt like manners:

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss Nia's work further. I can be reached at this number.

Manners are not the problem. The problem is whether you will pick up. A last line that offers a call is a date with a stranger. You put a number you answer. You put hours you can actually speak. You do not put a desk line that dies when you change floors. You do not put a mobile you never take for unknown numbers. You do not put *happy to talk* as decoration on a page you intend to forget.

You: *It's just a close. Everyone writes it.*

Me: *Then everyone has offered a call. You offered it with your name. Names get dialled.*

If you will not take a call, do not offer one. The letter can end on the recommendation and the two stories and your title. A close without a phone is allowed. A close that lies about a phone dies the first time Rowe dials and you send it to voicemail for a week, or you pick up and sound like a person who has never met Nia.

Jo is craft. She put her direct line on the Friday letter because she answers that line. She did not put the general Hart switchboard. She did not put a Slack handle. She did not write *my door is always open*, which is not a number.

Wes is craft. The portal box had no field for a phone. He put a line at the end of the paste anyway, inside the character count: *I can be reached at this number*. He meant it. When they emailed instead of calling, he answered the email with the same two stories as the box. The channel changed. The page did not.

Priya is craft. On the night she declined, she did not offer a call. A decline is a sentence. A call after a decline

is a conversation you did not promise. She did not write *happy to chat about other ways I can help*. Other ways are how a no becomes a maybe with a ringing phone.

Guide 14 — Character vs work

gossip as evidence

You have not seen Nia lie. You have heard, from a person you like, that Nia was *difficult* in a meeting you did not attend. You have heard that Nia is going through something at home. You have heard that Nia drinks, or does not, or that a marriage is a mess, or that a colleague cannot stand her.

None of that is a story you saw. None of that goes in the letter. None of that goes in the call. Heard is not a source. A source you will not put on a page is not a source you get to launder through *people say* or *I think the team found her*. The team is not signed. You are.

Gossip as evidence dies in both directions. Praise gossip (*everyone loves her*) is as empty as smear gossip (*everyone knows*). Everyone is not a witness. You are the witness, or you are not, and if you are not, you decline, or you write only the strip you saw.

You: *I'm protecting them from a hire that would be a bad fit.*

Me: *You protect with work you saw, named as work, or you decline. You do not protect with a hallway. Hallways get quoted. Hallways are how a name becomes a story the person cannot answer, because they were not in the hall.*

This book is not a defamation lecture. Fear of a lawsuit is a night you can feel in your hands. I will not run a

statute table. I will say: if you did not see it, do not write it. If you saw it and it is work (they missed the Friday close, they did not, they told you, they hid it), you may write the work, or you may decline because you cannot recommend. You do not write the marriage. You do not write the drink. You do not write the body. You do not write the child. There is no child in this book. There is no schoolchild. You write adult work, or you do not write.

Smear as entertainment is refused. You will not get a chapter that teaches you how to wound a person with a paragraph and call the paragraph honesty. Honesty about scope is a different object: *I did not see the year in the other department. I will not invent it.* That sentence is clean. *She is the sort of person who* is not clean. Sort of person is character as smear, or character as halo. Both are the wrong night.

Guide 15 — Letters that are nights

Jo: Friday, a draft, a mouth

Jo's manila folder is on the desk at 8:10. Hart. Nia asked on Monday. The deadline is Friday. Nia sent a draft on Tuesday night because a blog said that was helpful. Jo opens the draft. It is not her mouth. It is a stack of adjectives and a résumé dump and a last line that invoices a job.

Jo does not sign the draft. She also does not throw away the facts. The draft has dates she can check, a title she can check, a vendor Friday she actually remembers. She keeps those. She writes the rest.

The letter she sends, 22 lines:

12 March

Rowe,

I am Nia's manager at Hart, and I have been her manager for two years. I recommend her for the operations role at Nore.

Last October a vendor failed at four. Nia had a second supplier on the line before the floor knew we had a hole. We closed on time. I did not have to leave the meeting I was in. That is the ordinary way she runs a Friday.

In January we took two new people onto the queue. Nia trained them on the live list without dropping the client calls. The juniors' first week did not become the

floor's emergency. I know, because I would have been the emergency.

I did not manage Nia before Hart. I will not speak to that year.

I am happy to talk through this work by phone. The number under my name reaches me.

Jo Operations manager, Hart [direct line]

She sits with it on Thursday night, not Friday at eleven. The first line is who she is, how long, that she recommends. The title of the role Nia wants is in the first paragraph, not as a hook, as a destination she has actually looked at. Two stories, each with a time and an object. A scope sentence. A call she will take. A name, a title, a number.

What Jo deleted from Nia's draft, and why it had to go:

To whom it may concern. Rowe has a name on the posting. The draft did not look. Jo looked.

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter on behalf of Nia, who is without a doubt one of the most talented and dedicated professionals I have had the privilege of working with in my entire career.

Pleasure is a temperature. Entire career is a ranking Jo was not asked to make. Without a doubt is volume.

Privilege is a costume. Jo had two years, not a memoir.

Nia's responsibilities include and then a paste of Nia's résumé, seven bullets turned into a paragraph. Jo already had the chapter about two stories, not a dump. She cut the paste. The résumé is Nia's object. The letter is Jo's eyes.

She is a team player, a self-starter, a joy, a culture add, and a person of the highest integrity. Character as a shopping list. Guide 14. Out.

I am certain she will be an asset to your organisation and will exceed your expectations in every way.

Certain is a hire Jo cannot make. Exceed in every way is a promise. This book does not get anyone hired. Jo does not either.

Please feel free to contact me, and I hope you will give Nia the opportunity she so richly deserves. Hope is a plea. Deserve is a sermon. Feel free is a last line that does not mean a number. Jo put a number and meant it.

P.S. She is also a wonderful friend to everyone on the floor. Postscripts are novels. Friend to everyone is gossip as halo. Out.

The draft can start. The draft cannot finish. Jo's mouth is the test. She reads the twenty-two lines aloud. She can say them in a chair. She cannot say the draft.

She sends on Thursday. PDF. Hart letterhead because Hart allows it. BCC to herself. Copy in rec_Nia_Hart_March/. She does not wait for Friday at 4:50. Friday is the deadline, not a personality of delay.

What the annotation is for: a Friday letter is still a letter with two stories. A draft is a pile of facts and a pile of fog. You keep the facts you saw. You throw the fog. You do not rubber-stamp. You do not rewrite Nia's soul. You write the vendor and the queue.

You do not send Jo's vendor Friday if you have no vendor. You do not send her two years if you have two

months. Steal the first line, the two objects, the scope, the number she answers. Leave her floor on her floor.

Priya: the letter she could stand behind

Priya is craft. You have already sat with her no. That no was for an acquaintance she did not know well enough. This Tuesday is a different person. Eli. Two graduate seminars. A thesis committee. An adult applicant. She can stand behind a page.

The letter she sends, 24 lines:

4 February

Admissions committee,

I am Priya, senior lecturer in the methods sequence at Vale. I taught Eli in two graduate seminars (2023 and 2024) and I sat on Eli's thesis committee. I recommend Eli for the doctoral program at Nore.

In the 2024 seminar Eli's methods chapter came back from me with a hole in the sampling paragraph. The next draft had the hole closed, and a paragraph cut that was not supported. I did not have to name the cut. Eli named it. That is the ordinary way Eli takes a criticism that is about the work.

On the committee, the night the numbers did not match the figure, Eli stayed in the room and rebuilt the table from the log instead of arguing for the figure. We left with a table that was true. I was the person who would have had to defend the figure to a later reader. I did not have to.

I did not supervise Eli's internship year. I will not speak to that year.

I am willing to take a call about the seminars and the committee. The number below reaches me.

Priya Senior lecturer, Vale [direct line]

She sits with it on a Sunday, because the portal opens on Monday and she does not like a portal at 11. The first line is who she is, how she knows Eli, that she recommends. Two stories, both work she saw. A scope sentence for the year she did not see. A call she will take. No soul. No *deserves a chance*. No ranking of Eli against the rest of the seminar unless the committee has asked for a ranking and she has one that is work, which this committee has not.

What Priya deleted from her own first draft, and why it had to go:

Eli is one of the best students I have taught in twenty years. Ranking as a reflex. Twenty years is a memoir. Best is a volume knob. She had two nights. She kept the two nights. If a later form asks where Eli sits in a cohort, she can say so then, as a sentence with a cohort in it, not as a firework in paragraph one.

It is an honour to recommend such a gifted scholar. Honour is a costume. Gifted is a soul. Scholar is a fog when the stories are a sampling paragraph and a table.

Eli will make a significant contribution to your program and to the field. Future as a promise. Priya does not run Nore. Priya does not run a field. She saw a chapter and a table.

On a personal note, Eli is a delight and a supportive classmate. Classmate as character. Delight as temperature. She cut it. If support had been work (Eli ran the study group so the methods problem set did not strand three people), she could have written that as a third story. It was not a story she had with objects. It was a feeling. Feelings stay off the page.

I did not supervise the internship, but I am confident it was excellent. Confidence about a year she did not see. Guide 6 already killed this. She wrote the limit instead. The limit is the honesty. The confidence would have been a hide.

What the annotation is for: a graduate letter is still two stories and a scope. Adult applicant. Not a schoolchild. Not a parent over a shoulder. FERPA is a waive night already named; Priya's page does not lecture it. She writes work. She leaves the internship hole as a hole. She does not fill it with character.

You do not send Priya's sampling paragraph if you have no seminar. You do not send her committee table if you were not in the room. Steal the first line, the two objects, the year she will not invent. Leave Vale on Vale.

Guide 16 — The machine wrote it

brackets on a page you almost sent

A later Tuesday, same kitchen, less sleep. You let the panel finish. You replace two nouns. You miss a bracket.

I am pleased to recommend [Name] for the role at Nore.

You send. Rowe's inbox has a bracket. Rowe laughs, or Rowe forwards it, or Rowe says nothing and files a joke. The stories might even be right, if you had written stories. The bracket is what they will remember, because a bracket is a confession that a machine was the author and you were the find-and-replace.

A cousin: you replace the name and you miss the title. The letter recommends Nia for a job she held two years ago, because the panel invented from an old résumé you also pasted. Their file has the current posting. Your letter has a ghost. Ghosts are how people decide you did not sit with the page.

You open `draft_panel.txt` and you use it as a pile of clauses, not as a letter. You copy nothing that still contains a square bracket, a field, an *asset to your organisation*, a *please do not hesitate*, or a pleasure you would not say with your mouth.

If the panel wrote a sentence you would actually say (*Last October a vendor failed at four*), you may keep that sentence after you check that the vendor did, in

fact, fail at four, and that Nia did, in fact, run the second line. The panel does not know your Friday. You do. If you pasted a bullet and the panel turned it into a novel, you still have to recognise the Friday. Recognition is authorship. Paste is not.

Guide 17 — Send

one version, three doors, same words

The room wants a PDF. The handbook wants a portal. Custom wants a mail. You can do three objects with one version on one morning without turning the morning into a project.

Paste the same words. Upload the same PDF. Send the same body. BCC yourself. Screenshot the box. Put everything in send. Stop.

If you do the portal on Wednesday with two stories and the mail on Friday with a warmer paragraph because you lost your nerve, you have given the file two letters. Rowe may get both. Rowe may get the warmer one. The warmer one may be the panel. Then the call, Guide 13, is a call about a page you no longer prefer. Prefer the page you sent first, or send once.

One version. If you find a true error (a year that is last year, a title they do not hold, a vendor night that was September not October), you send one short correction, one file, one sentence: *The letter I sent this morning named October. The vendor night was September. Here is the page with the month that is true.* You do not attach a new personality. You attach a month.

If the error is that you wish you had been warmer, that is not an error. Live with two stories. If the error is that you wish you had named a soul, that is not an error. Character is a different night. Do not send a sequel to

improve your kindness. Kindness is for a kitchen, not
for a second recommendation.

