

## O-1 Letters of Recommendation

You must be able to demonstrate through objective independent opinions written by experts in your specific field that you have done “extraordinary research” and have an “international impact” in your field of research. The recommendation letters need to champion the applicant's achievements and guide the United States Immigration and Citizenship Service (USCIS) adjudicators into understanding the importance of the applicant's work. Special focus should be given to any international or national recognition earned by the applicant.

The OISS is not in a position to draft or edit letters. However we are able to give feedback on the letters to make sure they adhere to our guidance.

---

## Letters

Three types of letters are needed for this category:

- **Faculty Support Letter:** Your direct supervisor should write a letter of support. However this letter must also include the specific Yale appointment title, dates of appointment (from/to) and annual salary.
- **Advisory Opinion:** In order to qualify for an O-1 we must obtain a written consultation/advisory opinion from an appropriate union or professional association confirming that the applicant is an individual of extraordinary ability.
- **Peer Group:** If there is no such union or association to make an advisory opinion, then we will need to obtain letters of support from internationally recognized artists, faculty or scientists in the field, to represent the peer group. As a general rule it is recommended you have at least 3 letters of endorsement.

Please use these guidelines while seeking the letter writers:

- The letters should be written by the recommenders.
- A majority of letters should be from experts who know the applicant only through their outstanding achievements and with whom there has been no collaboration.
- The research should be explained in simple language so a non-scientist can understand the intricacies.
- All letters should be written to “To Whom It May Concern” and addressed to:

### USCIS, Vermont Service Center

75 Lower Welden St.  
St. Albans, VT 05479

---

## Concepts to Address

The letters should give specific details regarding the applicant's contributions to the field including technical procedures and terms. Although laudatory words are helpful, they are by no means enough. It is not enough to just list the outstanding journals where the research was published. But since they may not be scientists, the letters should be as simple and in plain English as is possible to describe the complex scientific breakthroughs.

Immigration often says that certain achievements are “normal” in the academic field: to publish, to present abstracts at conferences, to write book chapters, review works, etc. Hence, these letters need to point out how your achievements are “outstanding” and of “international acclaim” and sets you apart from others in the field. To do this it is sometimes necessary to look at the specific subspecialty rather than the field at large as it may be possible for a researcher to have normal contributions to the field of biology, but critical achievements to the subspecialty.

---

### Letters Should Highlight the Following:

- Outstanding nature of original discovery where the applicant has a key role (not credited to PI)
- International recognition for the exceptional achievement most would wait a life time to obtain
- The ground-breaking research which has altered traditional views
- Development of new area of investigation never before considered important to the field
- New procedures, techniques, clinical trials based on cutting edge research
- The writer came to know of the outstanding nature of the research only via its impact on public sphere (conferences, publications, media, etc.) rather than personal ones (working in the same lab, collaborative work).

---

### Letters Should Not Include:

- Future promise of research: phrases such as “most promising young scientist”, or ‘is sure to have a major impact in the future’ should be avoided.

The letters are not confidential and do not need to be in sealed envelopes. All letters along with the CV of recommenders should be delivered in the original institutional letterhead and if possible original ink signature to OISS. Please also send the letters electronically to the adviser who is working on your case.

**NOTE:** Immigration has denied applications based on their sense that the letters were not written by the recommenders. USCIS looks for evidence that the expert recommender did not write the letter (e.g. identical phrases, sequence and/or format). They have been known in these cases to summarily dismiss all letters as not credible.

---

**Source URL:** <https://oiss.yale.edu/immigration/o-1-extraordinary-ability/o-1-letters-of-recommendation>