

MODULE 3: GUIDING YOUR SUPPORTERS

Lesson Overview

Even well-meaning supporters often don't know what to write in a character reference letter. Without guidance, letters may end up too vague ("He's a good guy") or counterproductive ("He doesn't deserve punishment"). Your responsibility is to **guide your supporters**—politely, clearly, and without dictating their words. This ensures that every letter aligns with what the Court finds useful under **18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)**.

Key Concepts

1. Judges Value Specifics, Not General Praise

- ◇ A letter that says, "She is kind and helpful" carries little weight.
- ◇ A letter that says, "She visited me every day during my cancer treatments and organized meals for my family" shows specific, lived character.

2. Themes to Encourage

Supporters can write about:

- ◇ Work ethic (employer, colleague).
- ◇ Family role (parent, spouse, child).
- ◇ Community service (neighbor, mentor, coach).
- ◇ Personal transformation (faith leader, counselor).
- ◇ Integrity or honesty in past relationships.

3. Tone Matters

- ◇ Letters should acknowledge the offense but focus on the whole person.
- ◇ They should not attack the government, blame others, or minimize responsibility.

4. Consistency with Your Narrative

- ◇ Letters should reinforce your acceptance of responsibility.
- ◇ They must align with your own statement and sentencing memorandum.

Practical Guidance for Writers

Here's a simple **Letter Writing Guide** you can provide to supporters:

Format:

- » Address the letter: “The Honorable [Judge’s Full Name], United States District Judge.”
- » Include: writer’s full name, relationship to you, length of time known, and contact info (optional but credible).

Suggested Structure:

1. Introduction: Who you are and how you know the defendant.
2. Character Traits: Share 1–2 specific stories that reveal positive qualities.
3. Impact: Describe how the defendant has contributed to family, work, or community.
4. Closing: Express support, hope for leniency, and confidence in the defendant’s future contributions.

Length: 1–2 pages is ideal.

Example: Weak vs. Strong Letter

- » Weak:
 - » “John is my cousin. He is a good man who made a mistake. Please give him probation.”
- » Strong:
 - » “I have known John for 20 years. When my husband died, John drove across the state to help me settle my affairs. He worked tirelessly for three days and never asked for anything in return. That example reflects his deep commitment to family and service. Even after his legal troubles began, he continued mentoring my son through Little League, showing that he accepts responsibility and continues to serve others.”



Reflection Journal Prompt

- » If someone wrote about one act of kindness or service you've done, what would you want it to be?
- » What story from your life best demonstrates your true character?

Worksheet: Letter Writer Instruction Sheet

Fill this out and provide to each supporter:

- » Judge's Name: _____
- » Deadline to Submit Letter: _____
- » Where to Send Letter: (Your lawyer's office, not directly to court)
- » Key Themes to Consider:
 - ◇ Family role
 - ◇ Work ethic
 - ◇ Service/volunteering
 - ◇ Transformation/recovery
 - ◇ Integrity/honesty

Encourage them to check one or two themes and write from their heart.

Key Takeaway

Your supporters want to help, but they need guidance. By providing clear instructions, examples, and themes, you empower them to write authentic letters that carry real weight in the sentencing process.

