

O-1 “EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY” SUPPORT LETTERS

Your letter is very important. To make it most effective, please remember it is directed toward meeting very specific USCIS regulatory requirements, and is quite different from most appointment support letters. To this end, we make the following suggestions to assist you:

- I. Remember throughout that the purpose of your letter is to prove that the artist is: ***“nationally or internationally acclaimed as a person of extraordinary ability who has risen to the top of their field.”***

- II. State your own expertise and qualifications to evaluate the artist by explaining the following in a few paragraphs:
 - Your years of expertise
 - **Recognition received:** awards, published articles, editorships, reviews of peer articles and grants, your own overall **international** recognition, etc. in the field
 - If you have encountered the O-1 candidate professionally, through his/her work, presentations, articles, conferences, please so state, as this demonstrates that s/he is truly nationally or internationally known. Unlike an appointment letter, knowing the candidate through having been a former supervisor, co-worker or mentor of the candidate is actually *less* helpful with respect to national or international acclaim – so if that is the case, please deemphasize that connection and try instead to discuss your familiarity with his/her work and how s/he is recognized nationally/internationally by other luminaries in your field as well. The USCIS wants an objective, not a biased opinion.

- III. Explain how the Artist ***“recognized nationally or internationally as a person of extraordinary ability”*** using **USCIS REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS and language USCIS can understand**
 - A. Explain technical language and use authoritative “layperson” language whenever possible as it is directed toward an USCIS examiner
 - Must **assume** USCIS examiner reading letter has **absolutely no knowledge** or understanding of the academic field, nor of much common university terminology
 - Make it sound **authoritative yet then explain** any terminology in a manner understandable to someone outside the field

B. **Include as many of the following USCIS categories for proving national/international recognition as possible which are applicable to this scholar, though the first category (contributions) is most important for support letters:**

➤ **Describe initially the artist original art or projects contributions to the field – *this section should form the heart of your letter:***

*How is the art **nationally or internationally significant/acclaimed?** How is it **original? Unique?** Is this artist **the only one or one of the few** that is involved in this work? **How will it contribute** to the national/international well-being? Is s/he *a leader nationally or internationally* in the field? **Most important: describe how these contributions are nationally or internationally recognized as extraordinary, exceptional, unique, etc.***

➤ **Newspaper, press, articles, blogs**

What's *remarkable/extraordinary* about the writings of the artist. Are they *published in nationally or internationally recognized journals*? Very *prestigious or leading* journals? Have they received *rave reviews*? Is the volume significant? **National or international acclaim?** If you know, is participation of the artist in articles significant (first author in a number of articles, collaborated with #1 scholar in the field)?

➤ **Works or projects of the artist**

Discuss *memorable or exceptional works of the artist* of which you have knowledge – particularly those made to a *national or international audience*. Discuss the *significance of particularly projects, paintings, shows* etc. instead of just listing them.

➤ **Major national or international prizes and awards**

If you are familiar with and have expertise related to a major international award or prize for outstanding achievement received by the professor or researcher, you should ***explain the source of your own expertise and explain the significance of the prize or award internationally.***

➤ **Employment in an essential capacity for an organization that has a distinguished reputation**

Describe any past and future work of the artist that you have knowledge of.

Phrases and language to avoid, if possible:

- A. **Avoid** using “common” recommendation or appointment letter language which tends to weaken letter, such as: “she is *pleasant, unassuming, productive, talented, has great potential, etc.* etc.” Avoid using language which indicates the possibility of great *future* achievements without also focusing on current/past achievements. The purpose of this letter is to demonstrate that this person is *already* “extraordinary” and has “risen to the top of his/her field.”
- B. Saying “I read/reviewed her/his CV” will tend to contradict our claim of national or international recognition
- C. **Don’t** focus on or describe “non-outstanding” work – such as training, everyday stuff, non-scientific or scholarly work contributions – it is not relevant and could weaken case
- D. Try to be specific instead of vague and avoid speaking in generalities – ***give specific details*** to show you really know what you are talking about – ***explain exactly why s/he is exceptional.***”
- E. On the other hand, ***don’t be too specific unless it is helpful!*** **Example:** Stating professor’s contribution to article was about 20%. Rather, a reference to the article’s publication in a prestigious journal is sufficient.
- F. **Primarily** discuss awards or prizes that **DO** have ***national or international significance and recognition*** **NOT** awards from a University that are awarded its own students and scholars – these have no international significance and will only dilute the strength of the petition.
- G. **Avoid** using language that could lead the USCIS to conclude that your letter is biased. Emphasize that your expert opinion is based on familiarity with the scholar’s work (through reputation, research contributions, publications, presentations, etc.).