CRC letter writing guidelines http://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/referees-repondants-eng.aspx

Best Practices

When drafting your letter, please consider the following best practices:

- Be accurate, fair, clear and balanced.
- Avoid being unduly personal (i.e., do not use the nominee's first name).
- Support your points by providing specific examples of accomplishments where possible.
- Use superlative descriptors (e.g., excellent, outstanding) judiciously and support them with evidence.
- Letters should, ideally, be between one and two pages.
- Consider any points listed above in Letter Content that you may have left out unintentionally. Such gaps may leave reviewers wondering why these points haven't been addressed.
- Include only information that is relevant to the Chair position (e.g., do **not** include information related to ethnicity, age, hobbies, marital status, religion, etc.).
- Avoid revealing personal information about the nominee. Such information may be helpful only in explaining a gap in the nominee's productivity record (e.g., circumstances where health issues or family responsibilities have led to career interruptions) and should be addressed with caution.
- Be aware of unconscious bias and choose your words carefully (see below).

Limiting Unconscious Bias

According to a report issued by the American Association of University Women, implicit biases operate at an unconscious level, are influenced by our cultural environment and can impact our decision making. A study out of Wayne State University, which systematically compared letters of recommendation written for female applicants with those written for male applicants, found that, compared to the letters written for men, those written for women were more likely to:

- be shorter in length and incomplete;
- include gendered terms (e.g., woman, lady, mother, wife);
- include fewer 'standout' adjectives (e.g., excellent, outstanding etc.);
- include 'doubt raisers' (negative language, hedges, unexplained comments, faint praise and irrelevancies);
- focus on interpersonal attributes versus research skills/achievements (e.g., kindness, compassionate etc.); and
- include personal information that was not relevant to the position.

It is important to avoid unconscious bias within letters of recommendation as it can potentially have an unintended negative impact on the overall success/career of individuals—especially in the case of women. Research shows that social and environmental factors (including unconscious bias) contribute to the under-representation of women in science.

How to Limit Unconscious Bias

In order to limit the influence of unconscious bias within your letter, consider the following:

- Focus on comparing the nominee with the specific requirements of the type of Chairs position (i.e., Tier 1 or Tier 2, new or renewal).
- Avoid using stereotypical adjectives when describing character and skills, especially when providing a letter for a woman (e.g., avoid words like nice, kind, agreeable, sympathetic, compassionate, selfless, giving, caring, warm, nurturing, maternal, etc.).
- Consider using 'stand-out' adjectives for both men and women, where appropriate (e.g., superb, excellent, outstanding, confident, successful, ambitious, knowledgeable, intellectual etc.).
- Use the nominee's formal title and surname instead of their first name.

Consider whether your letter unintentionally includes gaps, or doubt-raising, negative or unexplained statements (e.g., 'might make an excellent leader' versus 'is an established leader').