



CAREER SERVICES / REQUESTING RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

There may be various instances in which you will find yourself in need of a recommendation from someone you've worked with during your academic career. If you are considering transferring to another institution, those applications may require a letter of recommendation. If you are applying to graduate school, all graduate programs require one or more letters of recommendation to give details on your intellectual capabilities and potential to do graduate level work. If you apply for jobs, not only do many employers require a copy of your college transcript, they typically ask for references and will do telephone reference checks at some point during the hiring process.

TYPES OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Letters of Recommendation for Continuing Education/Grad School

For applications to other educational institutions for further undergraduate study or for graduate school, you will likely be asked to provide at least one and perhaps up to three letters of recommendation. The institution may have an accompanying form you are to give to that recommender.

Phone References for Jobs

If you apply for a job you will most likely be asked to provide the names and contact information of 3-4 references. These should be individuals who know you and have observed your work, and they should *not* be family members. *Most important: before you put names on a list, make sure to get permission from those individuals first, and let them know they might receive a phone call if you are in an active job search.*

TIME YOUR REQUEST RIGHT – THINK AHEAD!

It is NOT okay to ask an instructor or staff member for a recommendation at the last moment. Keep in mind, they are very busy, and there may be other students making similar requests. They will most likely have to set aside special time to write the letter. ***It is recommended that you give your recommenders 4-6 weeks advance notice!***

SELECTING THE RIGHT RECOMMENDER

Faculty

Select faculty with whom you have worked closely and preferably those with whom you have completed more than one course. They will usually know you best and can write with authority about your strengths. Do not select faculty if you have just begun taking a course with them, as they will have no information to use in their letter.

Some other things to consider:

- Have I done well in this instructor's courses?
- Does this instructor know my strengths from experiences both inside and outside the classroom?
- Have I always acted professionally and ethically in regards to this instructor and her/his class?
- Can this instructor comment upon my intellectual development and achievement of skills?

Staff

Select staff with whom you have worked closely, whether it be in a counseling or advising capacity over the course of your time in school, someone who knows you from your extracurricular involvements, and/or someone you have worked *for* in a school related job. Some other things to consider:

- Has this person observed my growth and development while I've been in school?
- Does this person know my strengths from experiences outside the classroom?
- Have I always acted professionally and ethically in regards to this person?

- Have I performed well under their guidance (in activities or a job)?
- Can this person comment upon my intellectual development and achievement of skills?

HOW TO MAKE THE REQUEST

If your instructors offer office hours, it's better to stop by and ask in person. However, an email request is certainly okay, as long as you take the initiative to follow up in person to provide additional information. Ask the professor if they are comfortable writing to recommend you for your given context, e.g. further education, a job, a scholarship, etc. You may encounter an instructor who declines to write you a letter. Don't take this personally –if they don't feel they have the time, know you well enough to be very specific or write a solid letter on your behalf, appreciate their honesty and just find someone else.

MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOUR RECOMMENDER

Provide them info about you

- An updated **resume** that highlights the experience and skills relevant to the position or program. Don't limit your resume to academic pursuits—include extracurricular activities, job experience, and honors.
- **Copies of past work** done for them. Please ask them if they require any copies of such work, like graded papers or assignments that you completed for the professor's class.
- A **written description of your career interests and aspirations**—why are you applying to this position? If you are applying to graduate school, bring a draft of your “statement of purpose.”

Other tips

- Writing letters of recommendation is a time consuming process. Just filling in the information on the recommendation forms (name, title, school, address, phone, date, etc. --all but faculty signature) may take up to several hours if a student is applying to a large number of schools. If you can do this part of the paperwork, your recommender will be grateful and will appreciate your organization.
- Most recommendation forms include a section asking whether or not you wish to waive confidentiality. Make sure you have filled out this section and signed it, as the letters cannot be sent unless you have done this.
- Always include an addressed stamped envelope, with which your recommender can send their letter, unless the application instructions specifically call for electronic submissions.

IF YOUR PLANS CHANGE

Keep in mind, this is not a casual endeavor! If you've asked faculty or staff to write you recommendation letters well in advance, but in the meantime, you've changed your mind regarding one or more of those applications, ***it is imperative that you let your recommenders know immediately.*** Professors spend weekends, holidays, and late nights writing recommendations. It would be frustrating to come into school to hear a casual comment like, “Oh, I changed my mind. I am not applying to _____ after all.” Remember, you might want this professor to write a letter for a job or another opportunity later, so you do not want to burn a bridge, making them do unnecessary work when you failed to communicate your change of plans.

SENDING REMINDERS

One week before the recommendation is due, you may remind the professor via email. But please only send one reminder. If the deadline passes and the professor has not submitted the recommendation, a follow-up email, phone call or visit to the professor's office is in order.

FOLLOW UP

- Make sure to follow up with the school or job site to make sure they received all documents.
 - After your applications are complete, send your professor a note expressing your gratitude for their help with the recommendation.
 - When you know the outcome, let them know the end results too! They spend a good amount of time writing these letters, and they are always pleased to hear about the outcomes and where you're going.
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SAMPLE EMAIL REQUEST

Dear (Professor, Dr., Mr., or Ms.) Higgins,

As part of the application requirements to [___university, graduate school, or a job at ___], I have been asked to provide a letter of recommendation from a professor. Would you be able to write such a letter, with particular comments related to my work in your courses: [list courses]?

The deadline for submitting the letter is [date], and if you are unable to provide a letter, please let me know by [one week from the date of this letter]. If you are able, thank you in advance for your time. I am happy to stop by your office hours to provide additional detail and information.

*Regards,
Jane Doe*