

Etiquette when Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

Choose well. Request recommendations from those who know you, since they will be better equipped to write a compelling recommendation for you.

Ask your potential recommender, “Do you feel you know me well enough to write a letter of recommendation for me” for this particular position/program/school/scholarship/etc. Rather than saying, “Will you write me a recommendation,” asking if they feel comfortable writing one is a better approach and gives them a way out if they don’t.

Identify what function your recommender should have. Who can write the best recommendation for you for *this particular* position/program/school/scholarship/etc.?

- It is appropriate to ask a faculty member for a recommendation addressing your academic accomplishments and experiences, and when applying to graduate/professional school, for scholarships, academic internships, and research assistantships.
- If you need a reference for a non-academic position (i.e., a summer job), it is more appropriate to ask a counselor, T.A., current or former supervisor, RA/HA, church leader, volunteer coordinator, etc. for a reference unless a professor/instructor letter is specifically requested.
- If you aren’t sure, ask an OFSP staff member to help you decide who to ask for a particular recommendation.

Start early. Ideally, give the person three to four weeks, but never less than two weeks to complete the recommendation. Most faculty and staff are very busy and have numerous recommendations to write, so you want to be courteous. Plus, rushing them might lead to a recommendation that isn’t as polished or as positive as it could be.

If you are truly concerned about your recommendation being completed on time, and you have given your recommender ample time, consider doing one or all of the following:

- Give your recommender an early deadline. Either let them know that you will pick up their recommendation early in order to send it as part of a complete application packet, or ask them to send the recommendation by a certain date.
- Follow up at least one week before the letter is due in person or via email to check in and see if your recommender needs any additional information from you.
- Ask to be notified by email once the recommendation has been sent, if possible/applicable.

Provide full information. Often, faculty and staff will need some specific information from you in order to write an effective recommendation. Help us help you. Provide all of the following information*:

- About the position/program/scholarship/etc.*
 - The name of the position/program/school/scholarship/etc. and a description or brief relevant information about it
 - The name and title of the person who will receive the completed letter, if known. “To Whom It May Concern” is impersonal, and the inappropriate use of Miss, Mrs., Ms, Mr.,Dr, etc. can be offensive.
 - The address or website
 - The date by which you need the recommendation, and if you will pick up the

recommendation personally, or would like it to be mailed, emailed, faxed, or submitted online (if you expect the person to mail the recommendation, be prepared to provide an addressed and stamped envelope)

- If applicable, a reference form with your information already typed/neatly filled in

- About you*

- Your complete statement of purpose (if possible), or a statement of why you are interested in this particular position/program/school/scholarship/etc. and how it specifically fits into your short or long-term goals.
- Your up-to-date resume, which includes specific items (e.g., research experiences, leadership, courses taken, etc.) that you would like mentioned in your recommendation.
- Your most recent transcript (ask if the recommender needs it).
- The reason why you are asking your recommender for this particular recommendation, as well as who else will be writing recommendations on your behalf. This information helps the recommender adjust his/her comments in important ways.

Be gracious. You need to say thank you and send a personalized thank you note to the individual who wrote your recommendation. (A handwritten note is often more deeply appreciated than an email.) That way, they will be more inclined to write you another recommendation if asked again. Finally, let your recommender know if you got the job, the scholarship, admitted, etc. It is nice to let us know if our efforts were fruitful!

Begin now to create the contacts you need.

- Consistently attend office hours.
- Invite instructors to the Student Success Center's Out to Lunch and then spend time talking to them.
- Take more than one class from a faculty member whom you might want to write a recommendation on your behalf. Or, if this is not possible, ask the instructor for a letter at the end of the quarter (if appropriate).
- Get involved in research.
- Keep in contact with your instructors over time, so we stay current with what you are doing, get a bigger picture of who you are, and won't forget you.
- Attend events. Volunteer to help out.
- Join clubs and organizations. Take on a leadership position.