

## REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

### The Purpose of the Letters

A Letter of Recommendation is an evaluation of your talents and abilities, and a statement about your maturity and personality. It is typically written by a faculty member or supervisor and is used by internship/research placement, graduate school, and scholarship committees to evaluate your potential. Specifically, they seek a recent and informed appraisal of your intellect, accomplishments, maturity, motivation level, and ability to work as part of a team. The content and quality of these letters, as well as the caliber of the people who write them, are critical to the selection process. Strong letters of recommendation are often the deciding factor in the selection process.

### The Process for Obtaining Good Letters of Recommendation

1. Build a relationship with your letter writer. This process takes time and effort and should start early in your academic career. Connect with faculty and researchers in the classroom, through research and volunteer opportunities, or by attending lectures and seminars. What you do matters far less than how well you do it!
2. Choose your letter writers carefully. The best letter writers have worked with you on a project directly related to the program you are applying to. To write a strong letter that addresses the purposes described above, your letter writers must:
  - Be knowledgeable of your skills, work ethic, talents, and future capacity.
  - Know you as a person as well as a student or researcher.
  - Be familiar with the position or program you are applying to.
3. Provide letter writers ample time. Be considerate of your letter writers' time and workload. Approach them **at least one month** in advance of your request.
4. Contact your letter writers. If your letter writers are local, ask for an in-person meeting to discuss the program you are applying to. Take the following items to the meeting:
  - A copy of the program description or job announcement.
  - A copy of your personal statement and application materials (a draft is okay at this point, but be sure it is clear, legible, and of professional quality).
  - Your Resume or Curriculum Vitae.
  - Transcripts from all academic institutions (unofficial is perfectly acceptable).
  - Samples of your work and/or a list of specific projects that will remind the letter writers about the quality of your work.

*Note: If your letter writer is not available for an in-person meeting, then make your request via email or phone. Also, send the above materials via email.*

5. Ask “The Question”. Once you have met with your potential letter writer and shared all of the materials above, then ask: “Can you write me a **strong** letter of recommendation?” If the answer is “no”, or you sense any hesitancy, consider asking someone else.
6. Prepare your letter writer. Once they have agreed to write you a strong letter, make sure to provide them with all of the necessary details:
  - To whom should the letter be addressed?
  - Will they need to submit the letter online, and if so, what are the exact instructions associated with this process?
  - Will they need to mail a hardcopy? If yes, make sure you provide them a stamped, addressed envelope for their use.
  - Is there a recommendation form that they need to fill out in addition to the letter they are providing?

*Tip: Consider giving your letter writer a manila folder with this material for each of the programs that you are applying to as well as a summary sheet with program names and due dates.*
7. Check in. Send them a friendly reminder **two weeks** out and then again **three days** before the letter is due.
8. Give thanks. Write a warm and sincere thank you note to your letter writers once the letters are complete. Whether the program accepts you or not, be sure to inform your letter writers and thank them again. They’ve spent a good deal of time crafting a letter for you and they are your strongest supporters. Show respect and courtesy by thanking them and keeping them informed.