

Advice on Requesting Recommendation Letters

Writing recommendation letters is hard work, and can take several hours for each letter. Everything you do to make the process easier and quicker will result in *a better letter*.

1. Choose Someone Who Knows You

A reference is more likely to write a strong letter if she or he knows your work well, has worked closely with you over an extended period, and has been given time and material with which to produce an honest, well-documented, supportive letter.

Select your recommenders carefully--will they remember you? Will they have positive and interesting things to say about you? (Don't expect them to write a letter if you made few contributions to class.)

2. Always Ask Early

Try to anticipate that your reference will likely receive multiple requests. If you are considering asking for a letter, do so as soon as possible (*a minimum of three weeks ahead of time*).

Don't leaving forms or notes in mailboxes. Instead, approach the recommender with: "I am in need of a recommendation for (fill in the blank) and I wanted to ask if you would feel comfortable giving me a recommendation?" Remember that you are asking for something which you *hope* will say something good about you. *Never assume* that the person will be willing to write a letter. If the answer is no, then be grateful for the honesty, say thank you, and move on.

3. Provide all of the necessary information/forms for the position or opportunity

When requesting, provide all of the necessary information in an organized manner. Recommenders are not responsible for gathering materials or completing parts of forms that are to be filled out by you. Carefully read all materials before distributing them. Some references may ask you to prepare specific information that will be included in your letter.

Organize all materials so that your reference has all the necessary information and forms together for each program at the same time. Always include an SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) for each letter. Include any official forms -- *be certain to fill out all necessary blanks*.

4. Provide information about yourself

In a short cover letter, remind the teacher what your unique outstanding traits are, how you did in their classes, what your long-term goals are, and other things that might help to jog their memories. Be specific about what you would like the writer to address--reliability, punctuality, particular skills, personality traits, creativity, etc. If you want a letter that says more than, "She was a good student" you should be ready to supply your recommenders with concrete examples of your work, by including:

- a copy of your resume
- an unofficial transcript

- a description of recent and relevant independent work
- a description of desired position or graduate program/scholarship
- a description of your career plan (why are you applying to this position? If you are applying to graduate school, bring a draft of your “personal statement”)

5. Gentle Reminder

You may check in with the writer a week before the due date and offer a friendly reminder. You do not want to appear pushy or demanding. But you do want to make sure that the letter gets out on time. Perhaps couch it as an advance thank-you for the service rendered.

6. Say Thank You!

Most likely, you will be asking for recommendations throughout your life. Get in the habit now of thanking the person that writes your recommendation. A written note of appreciation is best. Also, once you begin hearing back from schools, return to the person who wrote your recommendations and let them know!

7. Letter's Not Done?

So the date rolls around and the letter isn't ready. What do you do? Politely remind your writer of your due dates and your need. Though your recommender has already agreed to write the letter, courtesy says that you may not make demands of your writer. Schools often lose letters and claim to not have received them. Don't assume your teacher has not written the letter.

Source: “Advice on the Etiquette of Requesting Recommendation Letters from Your Teachers” from www.surfturk.com

“Recommendation Letter Etiquette: Guidelines for Requesting a Faculty Reference” from Seattle Pacific University Website