

# 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 for your writer will result in a better letter!

## CHOOSE SOMEONE WHO KNOWS YOU WELL

A reference is more likely to write a strong letter if they know your work well, has worked closely with you over an extended period, and has been given time and material 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?

## ALWAYS ASK EARLY

Try to anticipate that your reference may receive multiple requests. If you are considering asking for a letter, do so as soon as possible. Minimum of three weeks ahead of the deadline.

Approach the potential writer with "I am in need of a recommendation for [insert opportunity] and I want to ask if you would feel comfortable giving me a recommendation?" Remember, you are asking for something you hope will say positive things about you. Never assume the person will be willing or able to write a letter. If the answer is no, then be grateful for the honesty, thank them, and move on to another option.

## PROVIDE ALL NECESSARY INFORMATION/FORMS FOR THE 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 you would appreciate being included in your letter.

## PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

In a short cover letter, remind the potential writer what your unique outstanding traits are, your interactions with them in class/work/extracurriculars, what your long-term goals are, and other things that might help jog their memories. Be specific about what you would like the writer to address [examples: reliability, punctuality, transferrable skills, personality traits, creativity, etc.]. If you want a letter that says more than "they were a good student/co-worker", supply your recommenders with concrete examples of your work:

- Copy of your resume
- Unofficial transcript (if the potential writer is a former professor)
- Description of recent and relevant independent work
- Description of desired position or graduate program/scholarship
- Description of your career plan (why you are applying for this position)
- If you are applying to graduate school, provide a copy of your personal statement

## GENTLE REMINDER

Check in with the writer one week before the due date and offer a friendly reminder. You do not want to appear pushy or demanding. However, to ensure the letter gets out in time, perhaps approach your message as an advanced thank-you for the serve the writer is providing.

## SAY THANK YOU!

A recommendation letter is a big favor: make sure to thank your writers after you receive their recommendation letters. A written note of appreciation is best. Once you start hearing back from schools/employers, let your recommenders know your progress and success!

## LETTER'S NOT DONE?

The due date rolls around... but the letter isn't ready. What do you do? Politely remind your writer of the due date and your need. Though your recommender has already agreed to write the letter, you may not make demands. It's possible the school/employer misfiled the letter, but claim to not have received them. Don't assume your writers did not deliver.

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