

Tips for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation, also known as reference letters, are often used to support one's candidacy for graduate school or employment opportunities. Below are some tips and factors to consider when requesting letters.

Who should I ask?

- Follow the specific requirements of each school or employer of interest. In some instances you may be asked to secure multiple letters of recommendation.
- Ask individuals who have supervised or evaluated you in an academic or professional setting. In addition to faculty members or professors, this may include a work supervisor, advisor, or volunteer coordinator. Avoid personal references (family, friends, etc.) unless the application specifically indicates that would be acceptable.
- Choose a recommender who know you well and can write a strong letter over someone you perceive as being in some position of status or importance but does not know you as well.
- If you are requesting multiple letters, think about the different voices of support you're getting and how, as a group, they discuss important aspects of your professional and academic life.

When should I ask?

- Approach your evaluators early and ask if they feel comfortable writing you a good letter of recommendation.
- A minimum of one month is optimal, but try to give as much advance notice as possible. You are more likely to receive a "yes" to your request and the chances for a quality, personalized letter are also increased.
- When requesting letters from faculty members, keep in mind that toward the end of the semester they may be burdened with grading finals as well as writing letters of recommendation for other students.
- It may be acceptable to ask within a shorter timeframe if you know the person has already written a letter that they can easily modify for you to use with a new application to a different school or employer.

How should I ask?

- If possible, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Ask if the faculty member would be comfortable endorsing you as a candidate for the opportunity to which you are applying, and then follow up with an email. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, a phone call or well written email is also appropriate.
- Make sure you state precisely what you are requesting: a general letter of recommendation that can apply to multiple opportunities or a letter of recommendation for a specific graduate program or job posting.
- Explain why you are asking this individual to write you a letter, and if there is anything in particular you hope they cover in the letter. This can help the evaluator focus their comments on what is most relevant for this opportunity.

What should I include?

- Share a brief description of the opportunity for which you are applying. A recommender can write a stronger letter if they can speak specifically to the relationship between your skills and experiences and the opportunity.
- Send your resume and or curriculum vita (CV), which helps to provide details about your background.
- Again, be sure to mention the reasons why you have asked the individual to write a letter for you and any additional guidance on what you hope they will discuss.
- Include a firm deadline and instructions about how the individual should submit the letter. Often these letters are considered confidential and therefore the evaluator is asked to submit the letter directly to the application portal.

How should I follow up?

- Send a gentle reminder about your request as you approach the deadline.
- Express your gratitude. Writing a quality letter of recommendation takes time and effort, so be sure to thank those who are willing to help you reach your goal.
- Remember to update your recommender on the eventual result of your application. In the excitement of acceptance it's easy to forget to do this, but it is deeply rewarding for those who have supported you.

Sample Emails

The emails below serve as only a suggested format or framework for requesting a letter of recommendation. Be sure to include the appropriate details and information for your particular situation or needs.

Dear Dr. Bulldog,

Thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation to support my application to graduate school. To recap our earlier conversation held during your office hours, I am planning to apply to Biochemistry PhD programs at ABC University, X State University, and the University of Z with the goal of enrolling in the fall of 2022.

I believe you are a great person to speak to my preparedness for graduate school because you have served as my academic advisor for the past four years and also as the primary investigator for my most significant undergraduate research experience. Specifically, I am hoping you can address:

- The increasing trend in my overall GPA due to seeking help and developing better study strategies
- My collaborative spirit in the classroom and in the lab
- Research skills, such as my suggestions as how to better categorize the data samples we collected from the field in order to more efficiently process results

I have attached a copy of my current CV, which will hopefully provide you with a comprehensive view of my key accomplishments and experiences.

The application deadlines are approaching later this month, and I would be grateful if you can submit your letter of recommendation no later than November 15. Over the next couple of days, you should receive an email from each of the 3 schools with directions as to how to submit the letter directly through their application portal.

Please let me know if you feel comfortable writing a letter of recommendation to support my candidacy for graduate school. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information that can help you in writing this letter.

Thank you for all you have done for me and for taking the time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Spike Zag

Dear Mr. Rogers,

I have greatly enjoyed working for you as an intern with the Spokane Symphony over the past year. I am hoping you might know me well enough and have a high enough regard for my abilities to write a letter of recommendation as I apply to full-time jobs after graduation.

I am targeting positions in the publishing industry, which will draw upon my writing and editing skills, as well as my organizational ability. I have included a copy of my resume to refresh your memory about some of the key projects I completed for the Spokane Symphony, and also to share some of my additional accomplishments and experiences.

As I am pursuing full-time roles with several different companies, I am hoping you would be willing to write a general letter of recommendation that I can include with multiple applications. My goal is to start submitting applications later this month, and would grateful if you can send me your completed letter no later than April 25.

Please let me know if you feel comfortable writing a letter of recommendation to support my candidacy for these job opportunities. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information that can help you in writing this letter.

Thank you for all you have done for me and for taking the time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Spike Zag