
TIPS FOR REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation, also known as reference letters, are often used to support one's candidacy for graduate school. Below are some considerations when requesting letters.

WHO SHOULD I ASK?

- Follow the specific requirements for each graduate program. 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 professors, this may include a work supervisor, advisor, or volunteer coordinator. Avoid personal references (family, friends) unless the application specifically indicates that is acceptable.
- Choose a recommender who knows 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 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 a strong and supportive letter of recommendation for you.
- A minimum of 1 month is optimal, but give as much advance notice as possible. You are more likely to receive a “yes” to your request and an increased chance of a quality, personalized letter.
- When requesting letters from faculty, 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 they can easily modify for you to use with a new application to a different school.

HOW SHOULD I ASK?

- If possible, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Ask if the faculty member is comfortable endorsing you as a candidate for the opportunity to which you are applying, and follow up with an email. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, a phone call or well written email is 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 1 specific graduate program.
- 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 IN MY REQUEST?

- Share a brief description of the program to which you are applying. A recommender can write a better letter if they can speak specifically to the relationship between your skills and experiences and the opportunity you seek.
- Send your resume or curriculum vita (CV), which helps 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. Typically these letters are confidential and therefore the evaluator submits 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 EMAIL REQUEST

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

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 2023.

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