

Letters of Recommendation

Whether you are anticipating medical school, law school, or graduate school in your future, you will need three to five solid letters of recommendation to assist you in your game plan. In addition to further schooling, some fellowships, international programs, and grants require letters of recommendation. These letters are documents that describe for the reader your unique strengths and assets that will make you a good fit. A recommendation is only beneficial if it is very positive. A poor or average recommendation does not help and can even hinder your chances of entering the program or obtaining the position you are seeking.

Some individuals choose to house their letters in secure, web-based tools that allow them to store, manage, send, and print their electronic and print materials. One place that provides this service is www.interfolio.com. There is a fee for this service.

Whom to Ask for Letters

- Professors/Teachers/Faculty Advisors
- Supervisors
- Current or previous employers
- Peers you know in a professional manner
- University Administration/Staff
- Anyone who has known you in a professional environment

Unless otherwise requested, it is a good idea to include at least one academic and one professional reference among your three solid references.

If a school or prospective employer requests certain types of recommendations, be sure to provide them with the appropriate types. For example, if a graduate school requests three academic references, you must provide the school with only those that are requested.

How to Ask for a Letter

It is important to provide the recommender with enough time to write a positive, personal recommendation. The earlier you ask, the more time you will give the recommender to write a well written recommendation. A minimum of three to four weeks notice is customary depending on how busy the recommender is.

In addition to allowing sufficient time for the recommender to complete your recommendation, you should provide him/ her with additional information that will help make a strong recommendation. If possible, schedule some time to sit down with your recommender to discuss your goals and the details of the program or position for which you are applying. Provide your recommender with all of the information and documentation that they may need. Ideally, this should include:

About the position/program:

- Details about the graduate school, scholarship, fellowship or program for which you are applying
- The deadline date
- Any specific instructions
- A pre-addressed, stamped envelope

About you:

- A resume or curriculum vitae (CV)
- Colleges/universities attended, your major(s), your GPA
- Specific skills and qualifications you possess that you want the recommender to highlight
- Professional, volunteer, internship and research experience
- Projects on which you have worked
- Presentations you have given
- Awards and/or scholarship information
- Career/future goals

- Memberships/professional affiliations
- Hobbies/extracurricular activities
- Papers/projects graded by the recommender

Don't Forget to Say Thank You

Always call, send an email, or write a thank you note to the recommender for writing your letter of recommendation.