



## How-To Guide

# Letters of Recommendation

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### **Think through the application process first:**

Before you approach anyone for a letter of reference, identify the number of people that you will need and the type of materials you have to prepare. Doing so helps you figure out what each letter writer's role should be in relation to your application.

### **Use the application materials to help you choose letter writers:**

Application materials are your best ally in helping you choose the right letter writers. Some applications, for instance, encourage you to choose individuals who can speak to your teaching ability or character rather than those with the highest stature. Take this advice seriously.

### **Seek a mix of letter writers and identify their roles for them:**

Collectively, your letters should reflect a balanced picture of you. If the person recommending you is expected to comment from a certain angle, be sure he or she knows this.

### **Choose people who know you well and help them know you better:**

Avoid abruptly asking someone for a recommendation letter after class, in the hallway, or via e-mail. Instead, make an appointment with the individual to discuss whatever you are applying for and how he or she can help you. If possible, give the letter writer any materials that might help him or her write a more detailed letter, such as your résumé or a draft of an application essay that you prepared.

### **Take these materials to the appointment:**

- List of your most important classes with grades for each class (see example on back for FERPA release)
- Résumé or curriculum vitae, especially if the recommender doesn't know about some of your work or internship experiences
- List of your activities
- Copy of the latest draft of your statement of purpose
- List of the other individuals you plan to ask for letters
- All the stamps, envelopes and forms your recommender might need, all filled out and ready to go

### **Respect a "no":**

If someone you ask for a letter seems to be saying "no" to you, seek someone else. The person may be inappropriate or may not know you well enough to write you a good letter.

### **Allow the letter to be confidential and let professors discuss your grades:**

On an application form, you usually will be asked if you wish to waive your right to see the letter of reference. Do so. The letter writer will then be more comfortable and probably more genuine, too. Also, many schools have a policy that a professor cannot reveal your grades or GPA in a letter of reference unless you give written permission. Those who review your application know your grades, and the professor will probably want to discuss them for your benefit, either to applaud them or to help explain any inconsistencies. Therefore, provide the professor with a signed note granting him or her permission to discuss your grades.



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### Helpful Tips

- Requests for recommendations should be made at least one month before they are due.
- Give the writer a stamped, addressed envelope to mail it in.
- Provide an exact deadline for the letter's completion and gently remind the letter writer if necessary.
- Fill out your part on every form, including your signature.
- Select individuals who know you well and will provide a positive recommendation.
- Help professors think of beneficial things to say about you, but remember: The professor will write about whatever he or she wants. You can only offer suggestions
- Stress the date when you're going to apply. For example: "Dr. Jones, I'll be applying by November 15. Will you be able to have the letter ready by then?"
- Allow a professor two to six weeks to write your letter.
- Maintain contact with your recommenders. Check in once a week to see if the letter is done. Be nice about it, but don't fall off the radar screen.
- Show gratitude. Give each recommender a warm and sincere thank you card once the letter has been submitted on your behalf.

### Sample Permission Letter to Write a Letter of Recommendation

I give Professor Truman permission to write a letter of recommendation to:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Professor Truman has my permission to include my grades, GPA and class rank in his letter.

I waive/do not waive the right to view this letter.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

For help with letters of recommendation or any other career-related issue, come see us in the Career Center!

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