

## How To Ask For a Letter of Recommendation

Don't ask "Could you write a letter of reference for me?" Just about anyone can write a letter. The problem can be what they are going to write about. Rather, ask "Do you feel you know my work well enough to write me a good recommendation letter?" or "Do you feel you could give me a good reference?" That way, your reference writer has an easy out if they are not comfortable writing a letter and you can be assured that those who say "yes" will be enthusiastic about your performance and will write a positive letter. (1)

- **Ask your professor nicely and politely.**
- **Early, early, early.** It takes time and care to write a good letter of recommendation and professors are busy. Ask for the letter well in advance of the due date. How far in advance? The earlier the better—at least a month before the due date to be safe. Never ask for a letter with fewer than two weeks until the deadline. Don't forget to tell the professor the due date of application!

## What information do my letter writers need to write good letters?

You can help your letter writers write enlightening letters by giving each of them a portfolio that includes: A cover note that includes:

- Information on how to get in touch with you in case they need to reach you
- What you would like emphasized in each letter
- A list of schools to which you are applying, and due dates, with the earliest due date at the top
- Any other information that is relevant
- Open and close your note with thanks and acknowledgement that the letter writer's time is valuable and that this letter is important to your professional future.

Recommendation forms – make it easy for letter writer to complete forms in a timely manner, complete the following:

- Applicant information typed in
- Recommender's name, title, contact info (telephone, fax, address etc) typed in
- Your unofficial transcripts (note courses you took with them)
- A draft of your [statement of purpose](#)
- A copy of your best work in the course (with instructor comments on it), lab evaluations, projects, publications etc.
- Your [resume](#) (2)

<sup>1</sup> <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/referencesrecommendations/a/recommendation.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradLetter.stm#4>

### **After a Professor Has Agreed:**

- **Waive your rights.** Many letters of recommendation allow you to choose whether you waive or retain your rights to see the letter. You should always waive your rights. The readers of the letter will give the letter more weight. Many letter-writers won't write a non-confidential letter. If you're nervous that the letter-writer won't write you a good letter of recommendation, then ask someone else!
- **Beware of spam filters.** Many schools and programs have online applications in which the professor must upload the letter of recommendation. It is not uncommon for the email messages from these schools to get banished to the "junk" mailbox by spam filters. Make sure your professor received the email from the school.
- **Follow up.** The absent minded professor is more than just a cliché. Your professor may forget to write your letter. Don't be afraid to check in periodically with your professor to see if the recommendation has been sent. Just be careful not to be a nag.
- **Thank your professor!** Write a thank-you note to your letter-writer (at least an email thank-you note)!
- **Did you get it?** Let your professor know if you get the job, the internship, or the spot in graduate school. They want to know!