

REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation letters are often used by students during college admissions and job applications. Some schools may even require prospective students to have at least two letters of recommendation during admissions. Writing a recommendation letter for someone else is a huge responsibility and getting everything just right is important. If you are hoping to get a shining recommendation from a teacher, employer, or mentor, here are some tips to guide you in this process.

FORMAT

There is no set format for writing a recommendation letter. If you are having a teacher or professor write the recommendation, they are normally very knowledgeable and experienced in writing one. More often than not instructors have templates already made up in anticipation of requests. Although, if you are asking an employer or mentor, they may require a little more explanation and insight on how to write a recommendation.

While requirements differ by institution, program and concentration, generally speaking successful academic recommendations should:

- Provide acknowledgment to your aptitude, curiosity, and sincerity.
- Demonstrate your maturity and dedication.
- Highlight your leadership ability.

REQUESTING A LETTER Who to ask

- Paint you as "well rounded."
- Compliment your character.
- Include other pertinent information about you-- things not readily evident from admission test scores or transcripts.

Given a choice about who to ask, ask someone who:

- Would be comfortable writing a letter for you.
- Has experience writing recommendation letters.
- Is familiar with your work and abilities.
- Knows you well enough to include personal examples in the letter.
- Has the highest and/or most relevant job title to your area of study.

Also, the higher up the writer the more influence the letter will have in the institution. For example, a letter of recommendation from a superintendent is more valuable than one from a teacher. Few people write outstanding recommendations well, either because they don't know you well enough or because they don't want to be bothered. If you help them by providing answers relating to it, they will feel more comfortable in the process.

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When to ask

Situations vary, but the more time you can allow for receiving your letter the better. As a general rule request your letter, far enough in advance that you know the writer will have enough time to do a quality job.

TIP: A good idea for high school students would be to draft a list of colleges you are interested in near the end of your junior year. You would want to give this list to your selected teachers before summer vacation, and request that they have them completed by the time you return in the fall for your senior year.

How to ask

Always be straightforward when requesting a letter of recommendation. Explain exactly why the letter is needed and its importance to you. In addition:

- Lead up to the request if possible.
- Let your teacher/professor/ employer know you are in need of recommendations, and note their reaction. You want find out their feelings on writing recommendations.
- Never put the writer on the spot. Always request a letter, don't demand one.

Things to Provide

- Offer to provide information that makes writing the recommendation easier.
- Let the writer know how appreciative you would be if they wrote a letter for you.
- Offer to provide a template for them to add to or just sign.

Make sure your writers have all of the materials they need in order to compose a recommendation letter, including:

- Deadline information- When you *NEED* the letter by and when you *WANT* the letter.
- Information about the school (if a college recommendation).
- A copy of your résumé, activities, accomplishments, and achievements.
- Your full name, address, e-mail, and telephone number.
- The name and address of the institution you are applying to, or the job/position you are seeking.
- A stamped, addressed envelope for their convenience.
- A letter of gratitude.

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DRAFTING YOUR OWN LETTER

Writing a recommendation letter for yourself, from the perspective of someone who will then approve and sign it, is not uncommon. You will find that many teachers or past employers will simply ask you to draft your own letter and then give it to them to sign and date. Although this technique for writing a recommendation letter can be looked down upon, it is a great way to highlight your strengths. When given this opportunity you don't need to be modest in underlining your achievements. Most likely, the person reviewing your letter will make any necessary changes if the letter doesn't fully reflect their views before they sign.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Only include the most important information about yourself.
- Choose key qualities and experiences.
- Revise and proofread before giving to writer.
- Always print on quality paper.
- Accept changes gracefully.