

A Student's Short Guide to Getting the Best Letters of Recommendation

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Who Do I Ask?

- Someone who knows you WELL!
- Someone who can talk about how well you work, your character, and your abilities
- Someone who you can trust to take the time and put in the effort to create a STRONG letter for you

Some good choices might be:

- **Faculty Members** (especially those from whom you have taken more than one course)
- **Advisors** (those that have worked closely with you for an extended period)
- **Coaches and/or Club Sponsors** (who can attest to your character, leadership skills, and response to challenging situations)
- **Supervisors in Employment, Service Learning, or Volunteer Settings** (especially those who have worked with students focused on an area of academic or career passions)
- **For some scholarships/academically competitive programs** the person MUST be able to speak to your abilities as a student – they MUST have taught you!

When Do I Ask?

If you are asking a school counselor or faculty member who is likely to get swamped with requests during “recommendation season” it would be best to ask **at least three to four weeks** before the letter is needed. For others, it would be most polite to give **at least two weeks’** notice.

How Do I Ask?

Ask potential recommenders, “Will you be able to write me a strong letter of recommendation?” Be sensitive to the response you get. If someone is hesitant, respect that and move on to another choice. If they feel they would not be the best person to write a letter for you, they probably are not. If a potential recommender suggests that you write the letter and they will sign it, get another recommender.

Do NOT ask when the person is in the middle of a crowd of other students or workers or in the middle of handling a “hot” situation. Choose a quiet time to ask in person, or make your request in a note or via e-mail.

What Do I Provide the Recommender?

There are a number of things you can/might want to provide:

ALWAYS PROVIDE:

- **Information about the letter’s purpose** (A letter might look different if it was for a scholarship than if it were in support of an application for a competitive business school and that might look different from one supporting an application to art school.)
- **Information about the letter’s recipient** (what is the college, major, scholarship awarder, looking for in you? What should the recommender highlight about you?)
- **Due dates** for the letter’s completion/receipt
- A **brief resume** listing your scholastic, extracurricular, employment, and community service accomplishments
- A **brief biography** if you have compelling family or personal history details that are relevant
- **Previous work samples** if it has been a while since you have worked with (or studied under) the person

Two Last CRUCIAL Items

Letters that are **confidential** always carry more weight with the recipient. If a form allows you to waive the right to see the letter – do so!

Your recommenders **have done you a favor** that has taken them a serious amount of time. Be sure to **THANK THEM** and **follow up** by letting them know if you were accepted to a program or won a scholarship. Your thanks/news are more meaningful than you might imagine to someone willing to go the extra mile to support you!