

Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation assist graduate schools in determining the strength of your academic preparation and the quality of the experiences you have had to prepare you for graduate study. Asking professors, employers, and others for letters may feel intimidating, but following these few simple pieces of advice can hopefully lead to you having a strong letter written on your behalf.

1. Consider, carefully, who your letter writers should be. Professors you consider should know your academic work very well and you should have had two or more courses with them. Other people to consider are employers, supervisors, coaches and others who have evaluated you in some capacity. Try to select people who will talk about different aspects of your capabilities and strengths so that collectively, you are presented as a strong candidate.
2. Ask your potential letter writers early! Professors, especially, are hit up early and often for letters. Asking early to secure a commitment is important to get a strong letter written in time for your application deadlines.
3. Provide an updated copy of your résumé and a list of programs that you are planning to apply to. Often, faculty would like to see a draft of your personal statement before they begin writing.
4. Give your letter writers sufficient time to write the letter and give them a deadline earlier than you need it. If you would like to submit your application on December 1st, ask your letter writers to have their letters either uploaded to the system or delivered to you a couple of weeks before that. Keep in mind that faculty are reading papers, grading exams, preparing for classes, and advising students; they may need a bit of extra time to complete your request. Be patient, but do not hesitate to remind them occasionally and politely!
5. Send a thank you note! Good letters take time to write, so show your appreciation with a thank you note!