

Tips for Requesting a Recommendation Letter



During crucial turning points in your professional development, you may find letters of recommendation are needed to support your candidacy for a graduate/professional academic program, clinical experience, research opportunity, or new job. There are key tactics to consider when requesting a recommendation from someone in hopes of obtaining the best support for your candidacy.

- Begin by deciding what you want represented about you to the admissions or hiring staff.
- Once you determine what you are hoping will be shared about you, consider who can speak to those attributes best.
- Ask a diverse group of individuals to write a letter on your behalf so many perspectives are offered on you as an applicant.
- Tell recommenders why you asked them to write a letter. (As my supervisor, you can speak to my work ethic or since you had me in organic chemistry, you saw my test taking ability and study habits in action as well as observed me in the lab.)
- Make sure to inform them about the process--who/what/where/when/why/how. Who is the letter addressed to? What should they discuss? Where should it be sent? When is the deadline? Why are you applying? How should the letter be submitted (postal mail, online, with additional forms, etc.)?
- Request someone's assistance well in advance so they have time to prepare or you have time to find someone else if they decline. Two to three weeks in advance is the minimum expected. Keep in mind they may need to send the letter out through postal mail which will need additional time buffered into the equation.
- Share an updated resume and/or personal statement with the recommender so they have more information about your application.
- Offer to pay for postage if the circumstances deem it necessary. The recommender may not accept it, but it is a common courtesy to ask.
- Follow up with a thank you note.
- Keep them posted on the outcome. Were you accepted/hired? They will want to know because they cared enough to support you and write the letter!

These are general guidelines to consider when requesting a letter of recommendation. It is important to make sure to review the application process to determine if references or actual letters are needed. Also, students should recognize the difference between individual recommendation letters and the committee letter sponsored through the Center for the Health Professions. See the Health Professions Student Guidebook for more information on the committee letter procedures.