

Letters of Recommendation

Guidelines

So you are applying to a college and it asks for you to provide letters of reference along with your application. For some students, this can cause anxiety about who to ask and how to go about it. The information on this page should help you feel at ease to professionally and politely ask for a letter of reference.

1. Who do I ask?

a. General rules to follow:

- i. Ask someone who knows you well. Someone who can speak to your character and who you are as a person.
- ii. Mix it up. Ask a variety of people who know you in different lights: a teacher to speak of your academic strengths; a coach to talk about your teamwork and athletic gifts; someone you volunteered for to speak to your work ethic; or a pastor who can speak of your passions and giving attributes.
- iii. Think about the major your applying for and ask someone who can speak of your abilities toward that major. For example, if you are applying for a science major, ask your science and/or math teacher for a letter of recommendation.
- iv. Never ask someone who is related to you to write you a letter of recommendation. Even if this person is your employer, coach, or teacher; find someone else.

2. How many letters will I need?

- a. You should ask between 3-4 people to write you a letter of recommendation. Typically, schools request two letters. Asking 3 to 4 people allows you to have some flexibility in the letters you send and also allows for room for error if the person you ask forgets to write the letter or is unable to complete it on time.
- b. From each person, you should request as many copies of each letter as schools you are applying to, plus three. So if you are applying to four schools, you should ask for seven letters. This allows you to have a few extra for scholarships, jobs, or if you apply to another school. You can always make copies if you run low, but it is nice to send an original.
 - i. Know that some recommenders will give you the letters of recommendation, but most will request that they send the letter directly to the school. If a person wants to send it themselves, ask them to keep a copy of the letter for any future scholarships, job applications or schools to which you apply. Also, you will need to provide the writer with an addressed envelope with a stamp for each school to which you are applying.

3. How do I ask:

- a. First, remember no one owes you a letter of reference. You are asking someone to invest time and energy into writing you a letter. Don't expect it or say to someone, "You have to write me a letter of reference." This is rude and will not result in a good letter.
- b. Find a time where you can meet face to face with the person to request the letter of reference. Only ask by phone if you are unable to meet the person. Do not ask someone via email, as they often get lost or overlooked. Be courteous of the person's time, if you are asking a teacher wait until the end of the school day or before school starts. Don't try to ask them at the end of a period or between classes, teachers are often busy during this time and it may slip their mind.
- c. Don't ask: "Could you write a letter of reference for me?" Anyone can write a letter of reference, instead ask "Do you feel you know me well enough to write me a good letter of recommendation?"
- d. Go prepared. On the following page you will find an outline that you should complete and give to the potential writer. This sheet will help jog the person's memory about all your activities and accomplishments. Even if you feel you are very close with the recommender, assume they remember little about your accomplishments and write down everything. It also serves as a reminder to write the letter and when it is due. Be sure to type it and save it, this way you can use it in the future if needed. Go over the paper with the recommender, be sure to tell them why you are applying to the school/major or for the scholarship.
- e. Ask the recommender if they prefer to mail the letter or if they will be giving the letter back to you for you to mail. Be sure to have an addressed envelope ready to give the recommender to mail the letter of recommendation to the school if they so desire. Do not expect the recommender to pay to mail your letter!
- f. Give the recommender a deadline. "I am applying to Juniata at the beginning of next month, I was hoping you could have the letter done by October 2nd. Would this give you enough time to complete it?" Make sure you give the writer three to four weeks to write the letter. Never expect a letter the same day or week that you ask.
- g. Remember to be gracious!

4. Follow up:

- a. Follow up the in-person meeting with an email. Be polite, respectful and concise thanking them for agreeing to write you the letter of recommendation. Ask the recommender to let you know when the recommendation letter has been mailed or is ready to be picked up.
- b. As the deadline for your letter approaches, check back with your recommender. (Don't nag)
- c. After the letter is mailed, it is thoughtful to send the recommender a handwritten thank you note to show your appreciation.

In a folder, provide the following information:

1. Write a cover letter that provides the following:

- programs you are applying to
- contact information for the individual/department to which the letter is to be sent
- due date of the letter
- mailing instructions
- pre-addressed stamped envelopes

2. Provide the writer with the following information neatly typed and organized:

Your Name

Email address

Phone Number

First school applying to attend (don't abbreviate):

Major Pursing:

Second school applying to attend (don't abbreviate):

Major Pursing:

Third school applying to attend (don't abbreviate):

Major Pursing:

Fourth school applying to attend (don't abbreviate):

Major Pursing:

School you attend: Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School

Current Grade:

Current GPA:

If you are asking a:

Teacher: List the courses you had the teacher for and the grade earned

Coach: List the sports played, number of years you have played, major accomplishments

Pastor: List how long you have been a member of the church, list volunteer activities at the church, list church involvement

Extracurricular activities (both for school and outside of school) and give a brief summary

For example: I have been in karate for ten years, earning two national titles and currently have a black belt. I volunteer every Monday at Grand's Karate School to help beginning students. Karate has taught me respect, focus, commitment and self-discipline.

Volunteer activities with a brief summary

For example: Since August of 2013, I have volunteered every Thursday at the Blair Country Humane Society. My duties include cleaning the animal cages, feeding the animals and helping to bathe the different dog breeds. As a result, I find myself being more compassionate, responsible, and aware.

Work Experience**Honors/Awards you have won****Tell them about your professional goals****Date Letter is needed by:****Number of Copies needed:**