

Letters of Recommendation

Nearly every professional program requires applicants to submit letters of recommendation. Don't underestimate the importance of these letters. While your transcript, standardized test scores, and personal statement/admissions essay are vital components to your graduate school application, an excellent letter of recommendation provides admissions committees with information that isn't found elsewhere in the application. A letter of recommendation is a detailed discussion of the personal qualities, accomplishments, and experiences that make you unique and perfect for the programs to which you've applied.

Letters of Recommendation FAQ's

How many letters of recommendation do I need?

Each institution will let you know how many letters are required. Generally, you will be asked for three letters. We recommend that you send only the amount of letters requested. Admissions committees do not have enough time to read extra credentials.

Whom should I ask for letters of recommendation?

The best letter writers are those that know you well and can provide an objective evaluation of your ability to perform and succeed at the professional level. If you are planning to attend professional school, take every opportunity to get to know and talk with your professors: go to office hours, ask questions in class, seek advice about your career, do independent research or study with a professor whose recommendation you may want. Each school or program has its own guidelines regarding who you should ask for letters. **It is extremely important that you follow the instructions and guidelines given.**

Consider the following people for letters of recommendation:

- Someone who knows you well
- Someone who is a professor at the school granting your baccalaureate degree
- Someone who has earned the degree which you are seeking in your graduate work
- Someone with an advanced degree who has supervised you in job shadowing, employment, or a internship aligned with the professional program you are pursuing (e.g., Medicine, Physical Therapy, Dentistry, Radiography, etc.)
- Someone who has academically evaluated you in an upper-division class
- Someone who has been highly involved in your pursuit of attending professional school (e.g., your academic advisor)

How do I approach potential letter writers?

First, make a list of professors and/or supervisors who will be your best advocates. Then, set up an appointment to discuss your request in person. Do not make the request via email. Be prepared to articulate your interest and reasons for attending professional school.

Letters of recommendation are written strictly on a voluntary basis; a faculty member or employer may decline to write them. The best approach is to ask potential letter writers if they feel they know you well enough and are willing to write you a supportive letter. If you sense reluctance or the answer is no, ask someone else.

When should I approach letter writers?

Professors and supervisors want to help you and are pleased to write on your behalf; however, they are usually involved in many activities. Faculty are especially busy during the months of November and December. Be considerate and courteous of your letter writers' time and workload, and approach them at least two months in advance of your request.

How can I go about getting supportive letters of recommendation?

Since your best letters will come from those who know you well, make an effort to get to know your professors and/or supervisors. Following are a few ways you can do this:

- Speak up in class
- Take more than one class from a professor
- Regularly attend office hours
- Do a research project with a professor
- Take on optional projects
- Participate in extra-curricular activities

The best strategy you can use to get a supportive letter of recommendation, particularly if a professor does not have a long acquaintance with you, is to provide your letter writer with ample information about you. (See below.) This way, you will get a letter that includes concrete details about you, instead of a letter that contains only your grade or class rank, which is of limited value.

What information do my letter writers need to write supportive letters?

You can help your letter writers write enlightening letters by giving each of them a portfolio that includes:

- A cover note that includes:
 - Information on how to get in touch with you in case they need to reach you
 - What you would like emphasized in each letter
 - A list of schools to which you are applying, and due dates, with the earliest due date at the top
 - Any other information that is relevant
 - Open and close your note with thanks and acknowledge that the letter writer's time is valuable and that this letter is important to your professional future.
- Resume
- Personal Statement

Should I waive my rights to read the letters of recommendation?

Students are given the option to "waive rights" to the letters of recommendation. If you choose to do so, you will not be able to have access to or read the letter at any time. Should you do this? In short, the answer is yes. Waiving your rights to read the letter shows confidence in your letter writer.