How to Ask for a Recommendation Letter

STEP 1: Select who to ask for a recommendation letter:
- Check program requirements for letters of recommendation. (i.e. science professors)
- Consider who knows you best and could best speak about your potential for the opportunity.
- If the individual you are hoping to ask is someone that you don’t know well, take steps to get to know them better before asking for a letter of recommendation. (see other side of doc.)
- Be aware that a highly known person is not always the best recommendation writer. It is more important that the writer know you well.

STEP 2: Be aware of deadlines for letter submission and give recommenders approximately 1-2 months advance notice.

STEP 3: Determine your approach for requesting a recommendation letter:
- You can pose your request in person, by phone, or through email. In person requests are best since the interaction allows you to really connect with the potential recommender.
- Make sure that your request includes reasoning for why you have selected this individual to serve as a recommender (i.e. “I learned XYZ from your class, which has allowed me to XYZ” or “This experience was especially significant because XYZ, etc. and therefore I hope that you will be able to shed light on XYZ”)
- Provide the recommender with a packet of information that will assist them in preparing your letter of recommendation.

STEP 4: Create an informational packet for the letter writer with one or more of the suggested items listed below:
- A Cover Letter: Should addresses the specific writer, thank them for agreeing to write the letter, explain why you’ve asked them to write the letter, and provide instructions, etc.
- Deadlines(s): Specify when the letter must be completed. As noted above, it is your responsibility to remind your recommender(s) of these deadlines.
- Destination: Provide the address and/or preferred method for sending the letter. (Ex. regular mail, online submission, or signed and sealed across the back envelope provided directly to you.)
- Position/Program Description Details: If applying to graduate school, state the exact program you are applying to (i.e. MD, MD-PhD, DO, etc.) If applying for a scholarship, the description should explain the terms of selection. If applying for a job or internship, the job description should describe the position’s responsibilities. (Whenever possible, include copies of materials from the source describing these things, or links to them online.)
- Personal Statement: Help the recommender understand your motivation and interest in the program/position you are applying to.
- Resume: Provide a full list of education, experience and activities
- Academic Transcript: Report coursework completed, grades/GPA, degree/major, and Institution(s) attended
- Project/Work Sample: Remind recommender of the work that you’ve done for them. If it is a professor/supervisor/etc. provide copies of your work with his/her grade and comments attached.
- Any Additional Forms/Documentation: Provide any necessary additional program materials and forms for the recommender to review and/or submit with his or her letter as needed.

Adapted with permission from MIT Professor Christopher Capozzola.
How to Get to Know Your Faculty

How can I get to know my faculty outside of the classroom?

- Attend department open houses and other campus activities that allow you to mingle or participate in events with faculty.
- Engage in research with faculty from your academic department/area of interest.
- Sit up front in class and participate. By preparing for each class as you've been instructed you will be able to actively participate in the discussion.
- Stay after class. Consider staying a few minutes after class to pose additional questions or to follow up on a point that was made that particularly is interesting to you.
- Use office hours to gain additional clarification on the material presented in class and/or to engage in conversation or discussion with your professor.
- TA for a class that you have a good foundation of knowledge or comfort with.
- Invite faculty to campus events of interest or to dine with you in the residence halls.

Some things to consider:

- Faculty are busy so it is important to be mindful of their time.
  - Consider using office hours since this is time that the professor has dedicated to meeting with students.
  - Five minutes of genial conversation is a good starting point. Pay attention to body language and if you get the message that you're overstaying your welcome graciously leave and consider another visit or different approach.
- Faculty are people too. While they are happy to help you with your homework, they also have interesting hobbies, interests, etc. to talk about. Look for common ground that may allow you to get to know or relate to your professor on something other than your class assignment.
- Faculty have diverse experiences. Faculty have a lot to teach beyond the subject they are assigned. Consider asking them about their own career development, higher education experience, research, etc.
- Faculty like to be invited. If you know of an event or activity on campus that your professor might be interested in invite them. You might also ask them to meet you and a group for lunch or dinner in your residence dining hall.
- Faculty don’t live in the classroom. When you see your professor on campus say hi. Friendly gestures and acknowledgements are usually well received and appreciated.