

Asking professors for recommendation letters

Plan ahead: it's never too early to think about who knows you and your work. A freshman who gets to know one professor each term will have eight potential recommenders senior year. Your most useful recommenders will have taught you more than once and be able to talk about major papers, projects, or presentations.

Ask whether a potential recommender feels like she or he knows you and your work well enough to be able to write a strong letter on your behalf. (If not, ask someone else.)

Remind your recommenders what courses you took with them and what work you did that was extra good. If you're asking for academic recommendations, remind them about papers, projects, presentations, research, service learning, or other work that reveals academic interests or accomplishments they might mention; drop off a copy if you can.

Educate your recommenders about you. Fill them in on accomplishments, honors, clubs or activities, coursework, and relevant work or volunteer experience—anything they might want to put into your letter.

Educate your recommenders about the job, degree program, or opportunity. Photocopy the job description or the scholarship criteria; print out materials from the school's website. Tell your recommender why you think this opportunity is a good match for you. For graduate programs, also give your recommenders a list of faculty and their areas of specialization. That way their letters can demonstrate that your research interests would let you work with multiple people in the department—something admissions committees often value.

Drop off a copy of your resume or application statement; all necessary forms; *stamped* addressed envelopes; and your own contact information in case the recommender has questions.

Follow up before the deadline to make sure your letters have been sent. (Professors get very busy.)

From your Career Advisors: Drs. McAllister (English), Parker (Linguistics), O'Donnell (Communication), and Rochelle (Creative Writing).