

Some general advice to students about asking for and writing letters of recommendation/evaluation

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Throughout your academic career (and beyond), you will be **requesting letters of recommendation**. These letters have a huge impact (more so than your grades or test scores) on prospective employers, fellowship committees, and other people who are in the position to evaluate your application. Therefore, requesting these letters should be something you take seriously and thoughtfully. That means you need to give some thought to:

1. asking the appropriate individual to write the letter
 - this should be someone who knows you well, both from the standpoint of performance in coursework (and labs, if appropriate), but also someone who can comment on your character traits about which employers, etc. care a great deal: *timeliness, dependability, work ethic, attitude about learning, ability to work with others, ability to overcome frustration or hardship, oral and written communication skills*. (This means that you need to exhibit these traits positively in your courses, job, etc.)
2. giving that individual as much advance notice as possible (at least 3-4 weeks for the first letter and 1-2 for subsequent ones) and letting them know:
 - the deadline for the letter to be received
 - to whom the letter should be addressed
 - if the letter should be sent:
 - as a hard copy through the mail – be sure the addressee/address are complete
 - as a pdf attachment to email (supply email address of recipient)
 - or if a request for the letter will be becoming from the institution via email.
3. giving the individual information about the position/fellowship/opportunity for which you are submitting an application (a URL or other pertinent resource)
4. giving the individual your updated resume or CV. If it has been awhile since you have interacted with the individual, you may want to include a letter explaining what you have been doing.

You may be asked to write a **letter of recommendation or evaluation** of a professor, laboratory instructor (or, in the future, a colleague or former employee/student). If you have never written a letter before, be sure you write a formal letter (consult the web – there are many examples). Minimally, the letter should have a date, the name of the person who will be receiving the letter (and their title and institution), then the body of the letter, which should contain:

- a proper salutation, e.g., “Dear Dr. Jones:” “Dear Committee members:”
(not “To Whom It May Concern”)
- in what capacity you know/have you worked with the person being evaluated
- a description of your interactions, with specifics (e.g., you can tell a story illustrating a quality that you admire or a trait that you want to bring to the attention of the reader).
You could write about a particular assignment and the feedback you received, or something the individual did or said that ‘made a difference’.

all followed by a concluding sentence or statement and a signature (signed) with your printed name below it.

As with all of your written work, proofread for typos; read aloud for flow and organization.

Finally, such letters are confidential in nature and therefore need to be sent/delivered in a sealed envelope, with the addressee’s name clearly written on the front.