

Recommendation Letters

Writing recommendation letters is hard work and can take several hours for the person to complete. Everything you do to make the process easier and quicker for your writer will result in a better letter!

View the [BUILD - Resume & Application Materials](#) webpage for more tailored advice.

CHOOSE SOMEONE WHO KNOWS YOU WELL

A reference is more likely to write a strong letter if they know your work well, has worked closely with you over an extended period, and has been given time and material to produce an honest, well-documented, supportive letter.

Select your recommenders carefully:

- Will they remember you?
- Will they have positive and interesting things to say about you?

ASK EARLY

Try to anticipate that your reference may receive multiple requests. If you are considering asking for a letter, do so as soon as possible. **Ask, at minimum, three weeks ahead of the deadline.**

Approach the potential writer with "I am in need of a recommendation for [insert opportunity] and I want to ask if you would feel comfortable giving me a recommendation?" Remember, you are asking for something you hope will say positive things about you. Never assume the person will be willing or able to write a letter. If the answer is no: be grateful for their honesty, thank them, and move to another writer.

PROVIDE ALL NECESSARY INFORMATION/FORMS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY

In a short cover letter, remind the potential writer what your unique outstanding traits are, your interactions with them in class/work/extracurriculars, what your long-term goals are, and other things that might help jog their memories. Be specific about what you would like the writer to address [examples: reliability, punctuality, transferrable skills, personality traits, creativity, etc.]. If you want a letter that says more than "they were a good student/co-worker", supply your recommenders with concrete examples of your work:

- Copy of your resume
- Unofficial transcript (if the potential writer is a former professor)
- Description of recent and relevant independent work
- Description of desired position or graduate program/scholarship
- Description of your career plan (why you are applying for this position)
- If you are applying to graduate school, provide a copy of your personal statement

GENTLE REMINDER

Check in with the writer one week before the due date and offer a friendly reminder. You do not want to appear pushy or demanding. However, to ensure the letter gets out in time, perhaps approach your message as an advanced thank-you for the service the writer is providing.

SAY THANK YOU!

A recommendation letter is a big favor: make sure to thank your writers after you receive their recommendation letters. A written note of appreciation is best. Once you start hearing back from schools/employers, let your recommenders know your progress and success!

LETTER'S NOT DONE?

The due date rolls around... but the letter isn't ready. What do you do? Politely remind your writer of the due date and your need. Though your recommender has already agreed to write the letter, you cannot make demands. It's possible the school/employer misfiled the letter, but claim to not have received them. Don't assume your writers did not deliver.

