

Instructions for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

There will come a time during your undergraduate career when you will be requesting letters of recommendation from professors (in their role of teacher and/or lab supervisor) or teaching fellows. These letters may be for summer programs, grad school, fellowships, jobs, etc.

Below are some guidelines that will help the process go smoothly. The list might look a little long, but it's probably things you would do anyway. At any rate, your efforts here will undoubtedly result in a more informative, punctual, and error-free letter.

When requesting a letter of recommendation, you should ask if the instructor:

- feels that he/she knows you well enough to write a strong letter.
- would like to see any of your problem sets, papers, or other items that might be helpful (in addition to the ones listed below).
- would like to meet with you to discuss your plans in more detail.
- would prefer to fill out an online form or a paper form, if the option exists.
- would like you to follow these guidelines. If not, then just ignore them and follow the instructor's procedure.

With regard to the first point above, it should be emphasized that the most important thing to do if you anticipate needing a recommendation letter somewhere down the line (which applies to virtually all of you!) is to *get to know at least a couple of your teachers very well*. Even if you did great in a class, your professor or TF can only write so much if he/she didn't get to know you.

After a professor or TF has agreed to write a letter, you should give him/her the following items, nicely organized in a folder (or sent by email, for the items for which this is possible, if the instructor prefers -- just ask). If you then decide to apply to additional programs, just supplement the folder with the new materials. But try to give the instructor all of the programs at one time, because this keeps things more organized and reduces the chance of errors.

1. A detailed list of all the programs you're applying to. For each program, you should provide:
 - Due date (specify if postmarked date or receipt date)
 - Name and location of the program
 - Website for the program
 - Whom the letter should be addressed to
 - How to submit the letter. Specify which of the three ways applies:
 1. Address to which the instructor should mail it. Note any accompanying forms.

2. You pick up the letter in a signed and sealed envelope. Give the date you will pick it up. Note any accompanying forms.
 3. url of the online recommendation form (if known at this time).
2. Stamped and addressed envelopes for the letters that need to be mailed, along with any accompanying forms.
 3. A transcript (you should be able to print one out from the web).
 4. A list of courses taken from the instructor, the year and term, and the grade.
 5. A resume, if you have one (this is a good excuse to write one).
 6. A personal statement about why you want to do the program that you're applying to, and what your future plans are, etc. You will probably have to write such a statement for the applications anyway. This statement is a good opportunity to remind your instructor of any particular strengths you have, if a significant amount of time has passed (and even if not) from your main interaction with him/her.

Finally, ask the instructor if he/she would like to be reminded of the due dates by email.