

REQUESTING REFERENCES or RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Begin thinking about which faculty you want to ask to write letters of recommendation for you during your sophomore or junior year. Do not wait until your senior year to try to establish the kind of relationship needed with a professor to obtain a strong letter of recommendation. In the process of deciding whom to ask and how to ask students often procrastinate for fear of imposing on the employer or faculty member. Writing letters of recommendation for students is a task that many faculty/supervisors enjoy. However, your reference(s) may expect you to provide vital information in order for them to complete the task of writing a strong letter of recommendation for you.

Follow these steps in asking for references or letters of recommendation:

- Ask (in person) only supervisors/faculty members with whom you have had significant contact, and who can give specific details and examples that illustrate your capabilities.
- Do not ask “personal references” including your family members, Priest/Rabbi/minister, your counselor or therapist, or other students. If you ask a supervisor/faculty member and they seem reluctant, you might want to consider asking someone else.
- Give the person you are asking 3-6 weeks’ notice from when your recommendation letter is due or when you plan to begin your job search. Remember that many faculty are not available when school is not in session, so plan accordingly.
- Ask at least three to five people to write recommendation letters for you or serve as references for you. Be sure to comply with the instructions of the company/organization/graduate school that you are applying to regarding letters or list of references.
- Complete the references forms for the organizations you are applying and provide that for your reference. That eliminates one extra step that helps them complete the process.
- Provide your reference with a copy of your current resume and a statement of your career goals, along with any other information you consider helpful (unofficial transcript, etc..).
- When requesting the letters, ask each reference how he or she prefers to be listed on the recommendation forms.
- Ask your reference if they would like you to leave them a reminder message on their voice mail or send a reminder email one week before the deadline.
- Check with the organizations that you applied to 3-weeks to one month prior to the deadline to see if your application has been received and processed and ask if any additional information is needed.

Always Say Thank You

Never underestimate how important it is to say thank you. Send a thank you letter one week after the person has agreed to write the letter, if the person has not written the letter yet this can also serve as a reminder for them. Keep in touch with your references—you never know when you might need their help.