

Tips on how to ask for a strong letter of recommendation

1) Choose your letter writers

- a. Choose someone who knows you well in a professional capacity, ideally in the core area of your application.
- b. A letter from a professor or other credentialed professional often carries more weight than letters from another student, office staff, or graduate teaching assistant.
- c. If multiple letters are required, it can be helpful to think about how the letter writers might complement one another to highlight your strengths. For example, can one talk about your academic record and another about your independent research, internship, or volunteering?
- d. If you feel that your prospective letter writers may not know you well enough, reach out and schedule a meeting with them

2) The Ask

- a. Send an email *before* you add their name as a reference to your application. Sometimes applications automatically generate a reference letter request, and you don't want to catch your letter writer by surprise before they've agreed to write you a letter.
- b. In your email, clearly lay out your request. Using the word 'strong' can be helpful (e.g., "...to ask if you feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation on my behalf")
 - i. Tell them a little about who you are (remind them how they know you)
 - ii. Tell them what you are requesting (a letter), what it is for (the purpose of the letter), and what you hope they might be able to highlight in their letter (e.g., your research experience, motivation, academic performance, etc).
 - iii. Provide details about how and when the letter should be submitted
 - iv. Include a CV, resume, transcript, brag sheet, or your application or personal statement (if you have it completed or a solid draft); anything that can help your letter writer craft a strong recommendation letter for you.
 - v. Offer to meet with them if you have not already
- c. Send your request at least 2-4 weeks in advance of the deadline.

3) Follow-up

- a. About a week before the deadline, reach out to your letter writer with a polite reminder and offer to send any additional information they may need.

4) Thanks

- a. It is common courtesy to send a short thank you note to each letter writer. Some suggest a handwritten note is appropriate, but email is widely accepted also.

Here are a few other links to advice on requesting letters of recommendation:

- <https://advising.stanford.edu/current-students/advising-student-handbook/letters-recommendation>
- <https://www.coursera.org/articles/how-to-ask-for-a-letter-of-recommendation-template-tips>
- <https://patricklivingood.oucreate.com/classes/advice-to-students-on-requesting-a-letter-of-recommendation/>