

RECOMMENDATIONS

AN OVERVIEW OF LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION & REFERENCES

WHAT ARE THEY?

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION	A written document that describes your qualifications and skills as they relate to your work, academic performance, and/or character (eg personality, work ethic, etc)
REFERENCE	A person who can answer questions about your work history, skills, abilities, and work style; employers and admissions officers often ask for reference's contact information to reach them directly via phone or email
RECOMMENDATION FORM	A short document asking about your skills and experiences through rating scales and multiple-choice and short-answer questions These forms are used to: 1) make it easier & faster for recommenders to provide info; 2) make it easier to compare candidates in a large application pool

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

PURPOSE: To convince an employer or admissions officer that you are a good fit for the position or program

Recommendations also serve as validations of your resume/CV from a trusted source & adds valuable insights into your abilities that may not be listed elsewhere in your application

WHO DO I ASK?

Professors/Academic Mentors OR Employers/Supervisors

If none of the above are available: co-workers, clients, or volunteer work supervisors (avoid using family or close friends for academic or professional positions!)

AN IDEAL RECOMMENDER...

- Is familiar with your work, can speak about it in detail, and feels positively about you
- Has the time to write a letter or provide a reference that will truly impress a hiring manager or admissions officer
- Is in a position of authority over you or has a reputation that will mean something to the employer or admissions officer (e.g. a faculty member, leader in the community)

Choose your references and letter of recommendation writers with care - they can make a big difference!

NOTE: Letters of Recommendation are the norm for academia & graduate school but are less common for non-academic positions

HOW DO I ASK? LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Step 1) Make sure you are asking as far in advance as possible - many faculty and supervisors request at least 3-4 weeks to write a good letter of recommendation while a recommendation form might require at least a week's notice.

Step 2) Prepare a short list of qualities and accomplishments you'd like to highlight in the letter or form. You might say something like, "I know the admissions committee is particularly interested in applicants with analytical skills, so if you feel positive about my contribution to _____ project, that might be something to mention."

Step 3) Recommenders may offer you the opportunity to review the letter before they send it, but they aren't obligated or expected to. If they do, proofread them and pay close attention to the spellings of university names and other branded entities. If you notice a mistake, it's fine to ask the recommender for a quick fix.

Step 4) Check in to make sure your recommender is clear on the deadline and can get the letter or form in on time *(However, be careful not to overwhelm or harass your recommender with reminders - asking too frequently or in an inappropriate manner might make a poor impression)*

Step 5) Remember to send a thank you note after they have given you a recommendation. It is not uncommon to give a small gift in gratitude for professors who write letters of recommendation for graduate school programs.

More tips for asking a professor for a letter of recommendation:

- <https://spu.edu/depts/eng/documents/RECOMMENDATIONLETTEREtiquette.pdf>
- <https://undergradresearch.missouri.edu/how-to-get-great-rec-letters/>
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/graduate_school_applications/requesting_recommendation_letters.html

HOW DO I ASK? REFERENCES

Step 1) Contact the person to ask if they are willing to be your reference *before* you give their name to a potential employer or admissions officer.

Step 2) Find out how the reference would prefer to be contacted and get permission to give out their contact information: name and phone number or e-mail address. Find out the best times to reach them by phone.

Step 3) Provide information about the specific programs and employers who may be calling. Discuss your goals, how you are qualified, and remind them of any particularly strong projects, grades, or other performance examples. Send them the program or job description as well as your resume/CV so they can answer specific questions.

Step 4) Remember to send a thank you note after they have given you a recommendation.

For more perspectives & strategies for recommendation letters & references, watch the MindCORE-sponsored workshop on “Strategizing Your Recommendation Letters” presented at the 2021 Mind Diversity & Equity Initiative: bit.ly/LORWorkshop21