Letters of Recommendation

Who to ask…

Remember that a letter of recommendation can distinguish you from other applicants. Choose a faculty member, professor, or internship supervisor who can speak to your work, abilities, and potential to succeed in a given career field or program. Letters from employers should only be used if the job is relevant to your future career field.

How to ask….

Although a formal letter should be used, it should be supplemented with an in-person request. Speaking one-on-one with faculty/supervisor can give the reference a better idea of your commitment to a specific program.

Remind faculty a week before the letter is due if you have not received an indicator that the letter has been sent.

It is usually a good idea to provide your reference with your resume, personal statement, and samples of your work to guide him or her.

When to ask…

It is recommended to ask at least 4-5 weeks in advance, but it is safest to ask the summer before you plan to apply.

Interfolio.com is an excellent way to store your most important documents and where faculty can upload or send your letters of recommendation.

* Check grad school admission websites for letter of recommendation forms specific to that school/program.

Suggested Structure for Your Request

Paragraph#1: In one or two sentences, state your reason for contact (i.e. "I'm looking for your assistance in getting into graduate school at Mills College.")

Paragraph #2: If applicable, mention who referred you and/or who provided you with the reference's current contact information. Remind the reference who you are and how you are/were affiliated with them, stating as many specifics (e.g. organization names, dates, other contacts) as possible

Paragraph #3: State the specific program/major in which you're interested, along with a brief explanation as to why you're a good candidate. Mention how you came to choosing this person as one of your references.

Paragraph #4: Suggest topics you feel are relevant to make a compelling argument for your admittance to the program.

Paragraph #5: Include a deadline (at least two weeks prior to your application deadline, if possible). Thank the reference for their consideration/ time/assistance and provide them with a means to contact you with their decision.

Don't forget to send a "*thank you*" note whether they agree to help you or not!

Start getting to know your professors:

- Find out about their research
- Be punctual for in-class and out-of-class meetings
- Show them your hard work
- Turn assignments in on time
- Get involved in their research

Goal: Have a professor get to know you so they can write a personal letter for you.