

Guidelines for Requesting Letters of Recommendation for Grad School from your Professors

Getting into graduate school is not like getting into college. Master's and doctoral programs – especially the top ones – are extremely selective. Beyond good grades, GRE scores, and your statement or letter of intent, strong letters of support are extremely important. A generic letter of recommendation is immediately recognizable by readers on admission committees and is, frankly, the kiss of death. A letter of recommendation is unique – it describes accurately your strengths and skills and is tailored to the program to which you are applying. It is also well crafted and convincing. A strong letter of recommendation, then, is worth its weight in gold! Needless to say, such letters are not easy to write. The letter writer must have as much information about you as possible. This includes information about your career goals, any professional experience you have, the field and sub-fields that interest you, your personal strengths, and of course, your college career.

Before you submit your applications to grad school, have someone look over your cover letter/statement and resumé. If the schools are asking for a writing sample, you need to have someone go over it with a fine-toothed comb (and not submit, say, a term paper riddled with spelling mistakes). You are also encouraged to seek out your main professor (the one with whom you worked most closely – usually your senior thesis advisor) in advance of this letter request, to get his/her advice on programs and a developing a strategy for crafting your application. The bigger and more important the program, the more time and effort you will want to spend on the application.

Because your professors want to write the most accurate, well-informed, and persuasive letter as possible, we request the following:

1. A **request** – in person (if possible) – for the letters of recommendation. A face-to-face meeting will allow us to gather lots of information directly from you to help us write a strong letter.
2. A **list of schools** to which you will apply with deadlines and addresses. Provide links to the appropriate program websites. The list should be assembled **in order of deadline**.

ALL THIS FOUR WEEKS PRIOR TO THE FIRST DEADLINE!

THEN....

AT LEAST TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE FIRST DEADLINE....

3. Create a packet which will include separate files for each school. Each school file will include:

- Links to the program website, plus any additional info about the program.
- Any and all required forms for application or links to online forms.
- Name of person or committee to whom the letter should be addressed.
- Indicate if we are to send the letter directly to the school, or if you will have them picked up.
- If letters are to be mailed, the packet should include addressed, stamped envelopes (depending on your instructor – ask).

4. In addition, your packet should include:

- Your letter of application or statement of intent that you will send out to the school; one will usually suffice.
- An updated CV or resumé
- Your academic transcript (can be a copy, does not have to be “official”)
- A list of the courses you took with the professor from whom you are requesting the letter, indicating paper topic(s), paper grade(s), and your final grade(s).
- Your major (usually Art History), your minor, and your long-term career goals

To allow your professors time to fit in your letters of recommendation within our existing work schedules, you must contact your professor at least four weeks in advance of your first deadline (with a “heads-up” and a list of schools and deadlines – as above). Your professors/recommenders must receive all of the information above, in a single package, **two to four weeks before the first due date**. (Allow additional time over Christmas and other holidays.) Each professor will let you know about other specifics or personal deadlines. Requests for letters with less than two weeks’ notice tend not to be entertained, so plan ahead.

If the letter of recommendation can be uploaded we do not need paper forms or envelopes. Please be aware, however, that sometimes the uploading websites do not work. Allow extra time before the deadlines for those cases.

Your professor will let you know, usually via email, once your letters have been sent.

Good luck with your applications!