

## Letters of Recommendation

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Whether you are laid off or leave your job on your own accord a letter of recommendation from your employer can be a valuable tool for finding a new job. Such a letter is often preferable to listing your supervisor and his or her phone number on your resume. A reference letter:

- ✓ Provides an organized analysis of your attributes and abilities
- ✓ Is a "fresh when written" appraisal not clouded by time
- ✓ Creates an unchanging assessment
- ✓ Saves future employers the effort of interviewing your former supervisor
- ✓ Saves your former supervisor the time and trouble of being interviewed

Importantly, obtaining a written letter also gives you insight into how your former employer perceives you-- on balance either favorably or unfavorably. With this information in hand you can spotlight a good reference or downplay a poor one.

Of course, if you must list a former employer as a reference and worry that he or she might contradict your glowing letter when called on the phone, we suggest finding out before it causes you a problem. You can do this via a confidential checking service.

### How to request a letter of recommendation

Ask for a recommendation letter from people who know you and your **capabilities**, i.e., former employers, teachers, coaches, community or corporate leaders, influential friends--people who have known you a long time. Relatives are not a good choice. Three recommendation letters are enough.

Be sure to give them enough time (3-4 weeks, if possible) to write the recommendation letter.

When you talk to them, state your goals and suggest what they might write to help you achieve those goals. Coach them to be specific; general

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praise is a waste of space. Don't be shy. A recommendation letter is a sales letter to sell you. Now is the time to brag!

**Follow up your request for a recommendation letter by writing a review of your conversation.** Give suggestions for your recommendation letter. You may need to put words in their mouths. When you send them the follow-up letter, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Then, feel free to contact them in a couple of weeks to confirm that they are aware of your deadlines.

**Once you receive your recommendation letter, send a *thank-you note*.** Tell them about your success and how they helped you.

### **Have you been asked to write a recommendation letter?**

**Are you the right person to write a letter of recommendation?** If you are asked to write a recommendation letter, you need to discuss the subject candidly with the requester. A letter of recommendation is most effective when a person writes it who knows the requester and his/her reputation.

### **What is your company's policy regarding letters of recommendation.**

Many policies have been established as protection against potential lawsuits. The common rule is write only positive, factual recommendation letters.

**Do you qualify?** Another consideration is your integrity--can you honestly write positive things about the requester? If not, you need to bow out gracefully without hurting feelings. On the other hand, if you qualify, you should brainstorm with the requester to write what he or she wishes to be said. Be sensitive to deadlines.

**Write only complimentary, yet factual, observations.** Avoid unflattering or derogatory remarks. If you cannot do this, you should *decline to write a letter of recommendation*.

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Remember that potential employers are adept at “reading between the lines,” and any negative implication may destroy a person's chance at getting the new job.

## Sample Letter of Recommendation

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### To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is my personal recommendation for Cathy Douglas. Until just recently, I have been Cathy's immediate supervisor for several years. I found her to be consistently pleasant, tackling all assignments with dedication and a smile.

Besides being a joy to work with, Cathy is a take-charge person who is able to present creative ideas and communicate the benefits. She has successfully developed several marketing plans for our company that have resulted in increased revenue. During her tenure, we saw an increase in profits that exceeded one million dollars. The new revenue was a direct result of the plans implemented by Cathy.

Though she was an asset to our marketing efforts, Cathy was also extraordinarily helpful in other areas of the company. In addition to writing effective training modules for sales representatives, Cathy assumed a leadership role in sales meetings, inspiring and motivating other employees.

I highly recommend Cathy for employment. She is a team player and would make a great asset to any organization.

Sincerely,

Sharon Feeney Marketing Manager ABC Productions

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