

Letters of Recommendation:

Helpful tips that can make a difference!

Letters of recommendation are an integral part of your academic career if you are considering graduate or professional school. Letters typically identify and give examples of your outstanding key qualities and strengths, other special abilities, and your commitment and potential for contributing to a specific field of study or career area.

Who to ask?

You want to have strong, well-written letters of recommendation because they are a primary selection tool. Graduate and professional school admissions committees rely on them. Therefore:

- Letters of recommendation should be written by people who know you well from work, internship, student organization, volunteer, or classroom experiences. Co-workers, supervisors, or faculty members are good choices. Family members are generally not the most appropriate recommenders.
- Approach people who you think will give you positive, “glowing” recommendations. Ask up front if s/he can give you a strong recommendation.
- Have letters written for you now when people are most familiar with your strengths and abilities and remember you easily.

Great is better than good

If someone you approach lets you know his/her recommendation would not be favorable, thank them anyway and choose someone else. Three detailed, excellent letters are far better than five or six vague, cautiously-worded ones. Admissions committees specifically look for the difference between “glowing” and mediocre praise.

Make it easy!

Remember, your letter writers have classes to teach and many other students for whom to write recommendations. Therefore, do everything you can to make this a simple process for them. Give them:

- relevant information about the school
- suggestions on what they might want to emphasize
- your thoughts on what you see as your strong qualities and skills
- a copy of your current resume and/or a printed summary of your involvement in student organizations and groups
- a list highlighting any coursework you’ve completed with them and how you did
- a copy of our tips for evaluators
- Don’t make them do all the thinking and don’t expect them to have a little biography of you in their head.

Details count

Letters of recommendation should be word-processed and printed on the writer’s letterhead. Letter writers should refer to you by your full name in their first sentence or paragraph, and even include your social security number to help identify you properly.

Follow-up

It’s your responsibility to submit complete applications, so it’s your responsibility to see that your letter writers follow through and send their letters. Remember, your application and deadlines are uppermost in your mind, but not necessarily in your recommenders’ minds. Give them a couple of reminders if necessary. Take responsibility for the application process.

Thank them!

Writing effective, excellent letters of recommendation takes significant time, so be sure to thank the people who write them for you!

- Thank them in person AND thank them in writing
- Keep them informed about your application process. Let them know how things turned out for you and what your plans for the future are!

The Career and Community Learning Center can help!

Please feel free to call or e-mail us with any questions you may have! 612-625-9358 cclc@adv.cla.umn.edu