

Requesting Letters of Recommendation

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Your potential recommender may know you quite well and need little more from you than the names and addresses of the schools to which you are applying. Perhaps this person encouraged you to apply to graduate school and it would seem odd if you then asked if she/he was willing to write a letter on your behalf. However, most schools expect 3-5 letters. Therefore, you'll need letters from faculty or supervisors who don't know you as well as your primary professor/mentor. Also, if you're more than one year past graduation, even the faculty member who encouraged you to go on in school will appreciate it if you ask them for a letter and provide them with helpful information.

Ideally you will have a face-to-face conversation in which you:

- Explain your plans for graduate school (Why do you want to go? What do you intend to study? What do you expect to do after graduate school?)
- Ask the potential letter writer: "Would you feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation for me." Do not assume that the answer will be "yes." No one is obligated to write on your behalf and someone who is hesitant to write is not likely to provide a great letter for you.

If you can't see the potential recommender in person, it's best to send an email in which you do what's suggested above.

Once the recommender has agreed to write for you give that person a document that includes the following:

- The names of the course(s) you had with that person and the grade(s) you received. If you completed a significant project in a course, give the title or a short description.
- A copy of the personal statement you wrote as part of your graduate school application. Do not ask your recommender to proofread or review this document. However, if she/he offers to give you feedback you should welcome it.
- All of the information they need for each graduate program to which you are applying. Programs will have different requirements. Here are some items you may need to include:
 - The name of the graduate program
 - The name and address of the university
 - If known, the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed
 - A copy of any form that must be filled out by the recommender
 - If there is a form and it requires you to sign a waiver, be sure to do that before giving it to the recommender
 - If the entire recommendation process takes place online, indicate that next to the name of the specific program and let your recommender know how to access the system
 - If the program requires you to collect confidential hard copies of each letter, provide your recommenders with an envelope with your address on it
 - The deadline for letters of recommendation