

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

IMPORTANCE OF REFERENCE LETTERS:

- Used by admissions committees and employers to provide insight into applicants' academic potential, personal strengths and weaknesses, and a more comprehensive picture of the candidate than test scores or grades alone.

HOW MANY LETTERS YOU NEED:

- The typical range is 2-6 letters, but this varies by school, graduate program, or position.

WHOM TO ASK:

- Ask people who know you well in a professional capacity: professors in whose classes you performed well, employers, and research, internship, or volunteer supervisors.
- Consider individuals who can comment on your personal qualities (motivation, persistence, enthusiasm, maturity, etc.) in addition to your academic achievement and potential.
- For students applying to graduate school, it is not uncommon for T.A.s whom you know well to prepare a letter in conjunction with your professor. The faculty member often discusses the nature of the course and your performance compared to other students, and the T.A. provides specific details about your personal and intellectual qualities.

WHEN TO ASK:

- Ask well in advance of deadlines, e.g. 2-3 months. This gives your reference at least one month to write the letter and allows for mailing time.
- If you are considering attending graduate school in the future, you may choose to request references now, if you believe recommenders will write a stronger letter currently. You can always request updates later.

HOW TO APPROACH POTENTIAL REFERENCES:

- E-mail or telephone individuals to ask if they would be willing to serve as references.
- If so, request personal meetings during office hours or a time that is convenient for them.

WHAT TO GIVE TO YOUR REFERENCES:

- Confidential vs. Non-Confidential Letter Authorization Forms
- Reference Letter Writing Guidelines (optional)
- Pre-addressed, stamped envelopes
- Unofficial transcript
- Current resume (with all your current contact information)
- Brief cover letter including suggested deadline for mailing letters and most important points to cover in the reference letter
- Personal Statement
- Writing sample (optional)

FOLLOW-UP:

- Follow-up with your recommender a week before your suggested mailing deadline. You may also contact the Reference Letter Service at 805-893-4416 to determine whether your letters have been received at Career Services.
- Write thank you notes to your references.