

So You Need a Letter of Recommendation

Here's what you need to know:

Whom do I ask?

Ask a professor who knows you and in whose class(es) you performed well, participating regularly and earning high marks. If you never spoke in class and earned a mediocre grade, then this is all that a professor can honestly write in your letter.

When do I ask?

Professors are very busy with teaching, scholarship, and service obligations, so ask them **at least two weeks before the due date, preferably more**, so they have plenty of time to write you a good letter.

How do I ask?

The best way to ask for a letter is in person, during office hours, or if that can't happen, in a polite email. Never put down a professor's name as a reference without asking first.

What will my recommender need from me?

Bring any paper forms associated with the recommendation and make sure they are completely filled out. If the letter has to be sent somewhere off campus, then it is common courtesy to provide a **self-addressed stamped envelope**. Recommenders may also ask to see other documents, such as papers you wrote for them, or documents associated with the application itself (job/program description, your resume or personal statement).

What do I do about that waiver choice?

Most application forms have a box in which you can choose to waive or retain your right to see the letters of recommendation written on your behalf. Either option is fine, but many admission committees and employers like to see that you have waived your right to see the letter, because this means that your recommenders felt free to be as honest about your performance as possible.