

Requesting Letters of Recommendation

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Why are LORs important?

- They are a crucial component of your application (employment, graduate school, scholarship application, etc.).
- Most graduate, research, and funding applications require them. As well as employment.
- They can often be the deciding factor in the selection process.
- They can provide a reviewer with an assessment of your potential to succeed as a graduate student or a researcher, or as an employee.
- So, it's vital that you select recommenders who can attest to your ability to do well and succeed.
 - This is often a faculty member, but not always.
 - Select recommenders who know you well and have supervised your academic or research work, or employment.

Who should you ask for a recommendation?

- Select someone who knows you well.
- Choose a professor at your degree granting institution.
- You may want to choose a recommender who has a degree similar to what you are seeking.
- Has an advanced degree.
- A professor who has supervised you in an internship aligned with the graduate program or employment you are interested in.
- A professor from an upper-division course who knows you, and can attest to your ability to succeed in graduate school.

Who shouldn't you ask for a recommendation?

- Family members or friends
- Political figures (usually)
- Professors or campus administrators who may not remember you or, even worse, they remember you in a negative light.
- Professors or campus administrators who you've only met briefly.
 - They cannot accurately attest to your ability to succeed in graduate school and their letter will most likely reflect that.

How to ask for an LOR

- How you request a letter of recommendation can have an influence on the type of response you receive, and also the quality of the recommendation.
- Prepare, and then reach out well in advance of the application deadline.
- Make a list of recommenders who you feel will be your best advocates.
- If at all possible:
 - Reach out to each person individually to request an appointment to discuss your request in person.
 - In your appointment be prepared to articulate your reasons for applying (graduate school, research internship, job, etc.).
 - Ask if they are willing to write a strong letter of recommendation.
 - If they seem reluctant, or say no, that's ok. Be prepared to accept this and move on.

What else is important to keep in mind?

- A recommender is usually quite honest in their assessment of your abilities and likelihood to succeed. Know your recommender and be sure they will portray you in the best possible light.
- Be mindful of your recommender's time. Most are happy to write a recommendation but they are also very busy.
- Be sure to give them plenty of time to provide the letter.
- Reaching out at least two months prior to the any deadline is ideal.

More Tips and Some FAQs

- How many letters of recommendation are usually required?
 - It depends, but usually two to three.
- Should I send more than the number requested?
 - I don't recommend it. Review committees often do not have enough time to read additional materials.
- What if I'm graduating and don't plan to attend graduate school for a few years?
 - Before you graduate, ask potential recommenders for a general letter of recommendation. If it has been some time since you attended school, some of your former professors may be on sabbatical, have retired, or you may need to jog their memory of you. It's nothing personal!

More Tips and Some FAQs

- I think my current research supervisor will write a letter of recommendation but they haven't known me too long. What do I do?
 - When speaking with your potential recommender, provide him/her with ample information about yourself and what you are applying for. This will help them write a more robust letter of recommendation rather than just information about your grades or work ethic. A bit more on this in the next slide.
- I don't really know any of my professors or my supervisor. What can I do?
 - Do your best to get to know your professors and supervisors. Be engaged in class, attend office hours, take on optional projects/assignments. At work, offer to take on added responsibilities, be on time, be an employee they can count on.

Even more Tips and FAQs

- My potential recommender seems reluctant but hasn't *actually* said no. Now it's just kind of awkward.
 - Give them an out. Ask if they feel like they know you, and your work, enough to write a letter for you. This allows them to bow out gracefully and prevents you from getting a less than stellar letter.
- How can I help my recommenders write a stellar letter?
 - Provide a portfolio and include:
 - A cover letter, your contact information, a list of schools/jobs where you are planning to apply, unofficial transcripts, your resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV), a copy of one of your best papers in the instructor's course (if applicable).
 - A draft of your Statement of Purpose, executive summary, letter of interest, etc.
 - Any guidelines for the school/program or employer
 - Links to letter submission portals.
 - Recommendation forms, if available.

Even more Tips and FAQs

- Should the letter be confidential?
 - If given the option of reviewing the letter, I recommend opting out.
 - A confidential letter indicates a great level of confidence for the applicant.
 - You hopefully already know that your recommender will write that stellar letter.
 - However, it's entirely up to you.

Questions?

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- Please complete this very brief and anonymous survey. It shouldn't take you more than two minutes, and it helps us to create relevant and informative future workshops.

Survey Link: http://csusb.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9MJLkSNb7DiO7J3

- The Office of Graduate Studies is here to support your success!
 - Office of Graduate Studies: <https://www.csusb.edu/graduate-studies>
 - April Lane, Graduate Student Resource Specialist, alane@csusb.edu – Cal State Apply, Graduate Student Assistance & Campus Resources
 - Check out our PREP (Professional Resource and Engagement Program) - <https://www.csusb.edu/graduate-studies/prep-program>

Thank you!
