

## WHAT IS A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION?

It's an opportunity to stand out! A letter of recommendation is a document written and submitted by someone who can speak to your character, work performance, and/or academic performance. The reader should feel like they know more about you by the end to help them make big decisions.

Often these recommendations are required during the college application process or when applying for scholarships. Unlike other parts of your application, you cannot edit these! You are putting your trust in the writer to recommend you based on the interactions you've had with them.

Including a letter of recommendation in your college or scholarship applications will help the reader get to know you on a deeper level and showcase why you are the best fit. It's important to know how to ask for a recommendation and what to provide those writing the letters so you make a great impression.

## WHO TO ASK FOR A RECOMMENDATION

Ask someone who knows you well. The goal of a recommendation letter is to humanize you and tell admissions officials, or those awarding scholarships, more about you as a person, you as a student, and the character traits you possess.

When asking for a letter of recommendation, the recommender should be able to speak to your personality and give insight into who you are beyond your grades. Examples of who to ask for a letter of recommendation:

- **High School Teacher**
  - Aim to ask a teacher from your junior or senior year in a class you did well in or one that you worked hard in. You could also ask a teacher who helped sponsor a club you started or joined. Because teachers write recommendations often, they should have experience providing a well-rounded letter.
- **High School Counselor**
  - Did you meet with your school counselor often to discuss goals for the future or how to excel while in high school? School counselors can speak to your character and how you did in your classes throughout high school.
- **Community Leader**
  - Colleges and others love to hear about your involvement in your community. If you've volunteered, participated in leadership roles, or regularly attended organized community clubs, ask your community leader to write you a letter of recommendation.
- **Coach**
  - Part of a team? Ask your coach to speak to your character as a teammate or individual who's determined to succeed and can put in the work.
- **Former Manager**
  - Your high school job is more than just a paycheck! It helped you build character, learn more about your interests, and add experience to your resume. Ask your employer to write a letter of recommendation if you know you put in the work and were with them for more than just a few weeks.

## **INFORMATION TO GATHER BEFORE ASKING FOR A RECOMMENDATION**

Make it easy on your recommender. Before asking for a letter of recommendation, prepare some materials that will give that individual all the necessary details:

- What the letter is for (university application, job, scholarship)
- Who to address the letter to
- Submission requirements including deadline and desired format

You may also want to include materials they can use to “brag” about you. Include personal information describing:

- Future aspirations and goals
- Intended major and why you’re choosing it
- Awards, honors, or accomplishments
- Relevant extracurricular activities

These materials will help your recommender stay focused on key topics while including personal anecdotes. Remember, you aren’t able to revise what they share, so giving them more information will help their letter match your goals.

Set up a dedicated time to meet with the individuals. Give yourself time to ask your writer if they are comfortable writing you a recommendation and answer any questions they may have. You don’t want your writer to feel rushed or caught off guard! The more thorough the ask, the more likely they are to help.

## **WHEN YOU SHOULD REQUEST LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

When requesting a recommendation letter, make sure you give your recommender plenty of time. Try not to wait until the last minute. At the very least, ask someone to write a letter a month before the application deadline. It’s best to alert your letter writers during the spring of your junior year. This gives them plenty of time to plan ahead and fit in writing your letter with their school schedule and summer vacation.

It’s important to be respectful of their time and avoid them feeling rushed when writing. Keep in mind many teachers will put a cap on the number of letters they are willing to write since they receive many requests. So plan ahead and put in your request early!

## **HOW TO ASK FOR A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION**

If you can, make your request in person. This will make the request personal, respectful, and responsible. Practice what you’re going to say beforehand. The request should be heartfelt, and tell them how you’ve enjoyed their instruction and guidance, and how you would be honored if they wrote you a letter.

If they agree to write a letter of recommendation, follow up with a polished email outlining the ask again. Reiterate details such as how long it should be, the submission deadline, submission instructions, and what the recommendation letter is for. Include your “brag” sheet so they can easily access it once they start writing your letter of recommendation. Don’t be afraid to send a reminder in advance of the deadline since often they will have multiple to write.

## RECOMMENDATION LETTER REQUEST EMAIL EXAMPLE

 **Sent**

Hi Mr. Johnson,

I am applying to the University of Virginia this fall and would greatly appreciate it if you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation as part of my college application. I am looking to pursue a finance major and believe your recommendation can provide admissions offers with a clear understanding of my readiness. While in your pre-calculus class, I regularly attended study sessions, met with you when I didn't understand concepts and worked hard to submit all my assignments on time. I also had the pleasure of participating in the future entrepreneurs club you helped sponsor, which is what inspired me to pursue a finance major. I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss further details and answer any questions you may have. And, of course, I understand if you aren't able to write a recommendation letter for me at this time.

Request:

1-page letter of recommendation

Due December 1, 2023

Thank you,  
John Smith

## FINAL STEPS FOR RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Once you have the initial ask out of the way, consider these tips to make sure the process goes smoothly:

- **Don't make copies, edit, or use the letter again!**
  - If you have multiple schools or scholarships that you need letters of recommendation for, make sure your recommender knows and agrees to provide one for each.
- **Follow up before the deadline.**
  - As the application deadline approaches, it's a good idea to contact your recommenders and politely remind them to submit their letters.
- **Send a thank you.**
  - After they've submitted your letter, write a card thanking them for their time and dedication to helping you achieve your goals.
- **Share the good news!**
  - Did you get the school or scholarship you were hoping for? Send a follow-up email letting them know and thanking them again. They want to hear about your success!