

Requesting a letter of recommendation from a faculty member

For graduate school, a grant, fellowship, or award, or something else

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Who should I ask to write me a letter of recommendation?

Ask faculty members who know you well so that they can write a substantive letter for you. Professors in your small seminar courses will typically know you better than the professor who taught your 500-student survey course. Faculty with whom you've worked on research, scholarly or creative projects are also good choices.

When should I ask her/him to write me a letter of recommendation?

Start talking to potential letter writers as soon as you start considering applying to graduate school – even up to a year before you will apply. They can provide advice about how to find a good program, the application process, what to include in your personal statement, etc.

Ask the faculty member to write your letter at least two months before the letter is due. If you don't give the faculty member enough advance notice, s/he may not have enough time to write you the best possible letter. If you plan to take a break/gap year between college and graduate school, before you graduate from college, ask the faculty member if s/he would be willing to write you a letter and then make sure you keep in touch with the faculty member during your break/gap year.

If you worked with the faculty member on a research, scholarly or creative project, ask the faculty member if s/he would like you to prepare a summary of the work you did. Do this before you graduate.

What/how should I ask her/him?

Ask the faculty member if s/he can write you a strong positive letter of support to accompany your application. If s/he says no, thank the faculty member and let him/her know that you will ask someone else.

A negative, or standard letter indicating only that you were a student in the faculty member's class and got a grade of A, will not help you. Ask the faculty member if s/he has the time to write you a good letter by the submission deadline.

What materials or information should I give to the faculty member who agrees to write a recommendation?

Provide the faculty member with:

- A list that includes all schools/programs/awards along with their submission deadlines, instructions and materials (e.g., link to online submission site, addressed stamped envelopes if letters need to be mailed)
- Your CV or resume and unofficial transcript.
- Your personal statement
- The names of faculty with whom you'd like to work at each graduate program (this is a good idea if you are applying for doctoral programs, but isn't typically necessary for award applications or medical, law or other professional schools)

Ask the faculty member if s/he would also like you to provide a draft letter or bullet points indicating how you are a good fit for each program (based on your achievements, interests and experience) and why you are excited about each program.