# How to request a letter of Recommendation

When you are competing for a place in a graduate program or for a scholarship, your letters of recommendation from people who know you and know your work are often the deciding factor in whether or not you will succeed. Similarly, employers take good letters of recommendation into serious consideration when making a hiring decision.

It takes time and careful thought--for both the student and the instructor--to write a "good" letter of recommendation. You should spend at least as much time preparing your request for a letter as you expect the instructor to spend writing it. When seeking letters of recommendation from faculty, you're more likely to get a "good" letter if you heed the following suggestions.

**The single best thing you can do** to get a good letter of recommendation--particularly if an instructor does not have a long acquaintance with you--is to provide your letter writer with useful information. Here is the type of information letter writers often find helpful:

* your overall GPA a list of nursing courses you have taken, and grades earned
* honor societies to which you belong awards that you have won activities in which you have participated (and any offices held)
* leadership positions you've held, or examples in which you've demonstrated significant leadershipwork experience service activities such as volunteer work
* a description of your professional goals
* a current resumé

With this information, you can help your referees make their best possible case for you, to help you get a scholarship, attain employment or get admitted to graduate school.

1. **Do your homework first.** Look carefully at what's wanted by the committee or employer to which the letter will go. If they ask for a statement of purpose and/or mention specific criteria they want addressed, make sure you actually "fit the profile." Also, target your accomplishments to fit the criteria of the committee or employer. Employers, graduate schools and scholarship committees are all looking for different things. Each needs a letter addressing their specific criteria.
2. **Prepare a statement of purpose** that explains to the instructor from whom you're requesting the letter what the letter of recommendation is for. Give enough information so that the instructor knows why the letter is needed and what you're applying for.
3. **Prepare a draft of short paragraphs** that honestly describe you. Tie the graduate school or employer criteria to specific tasks or projects you did that the instructor knows about (in a course, in an independent study, in a clinical placement, etc.). Consult your transcripts as necessary and indicate courses that you took from the instructor, grades that were earned, and anything else that you did that make you stand out. It is the responsibility of the person requesting the letter to ensure that the writer has all the relevant facts. Don't make the instructor try to remember everything you did -- refresh their memories with specific examples.
4. **Prepare your draft to** **make it sound as professional as possible.** Be truthful AND accurate. The draft should be neatly typed and should have no spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, or typos.
5. **Only after you've done the above should you approach an instructor**to ask them to do you the favor of writing a letter of recommendation. Remember -- **no one is required to** write you a letter of recommendation, so ask nicely and give them enough information to write a letter of sufficient specificity.
6. **Include the title/name and mailing address of the person to whom the letter should be sent,** and a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you want a copy sent to you.
7. **The manner in which a student asks for a letter of recommendation can make a difference** in the strength of the recommendation.

***The following are ways not to ask an instructor for a letter of recommendation:***

* sliding a note under the instructor's door
* asking the instructor in the corridor
* leaving a request in the instructor's mailbox
* asking an instructor on the phone
* requesting a letter at the last minute
* asking for a letter without providing the writer adequate information
* handing the instructor a page of scribbled notes.

***The best way...***

**The best way to ask an instructor to write a letter of recommendation is to have prepared an electronic copy** of the information described above and **to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss it**. It is prudent for letters to be requested at least three weeks before they're actually needed.

**Don't forget to thank an instructor** who has taken time to write a letter for you. We also appreciate a follow up when you are successful to share your joyous news.