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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are used to apply for graduate and professional schools and some types of employment. Most graduate programs require 3 to 5 letters of recommendation. A faculty member in your department is usually the best reference for graduate school, but letters from faculty from non-major classes or non-classroom experiences such as internships, volunteer experiences, and research projects can also be used. Be sure to confirm any specific guidelines offered by the program or position of interest.

GUIDELINES

Securing a strong letter of recommendation can be easily done by following these guidelines:

- Request your recommendation well in advance of the due date. References will appreciate having as much time as possible to prepare your letter. At a minimum give your reference two weeks to prepare your letter.
- Select someone who can evaluate your past performance, character, and skills in a fair and accurate manner, and will write a strong recommendation. You may want to ask if they are willing and able to write you a strong letter. If they don't feel comfortable writing your reference they may suggest that you find someone else to write it. It is in your best interest to do this.
- Give your writer a copy of your resume. This will provide the writer with a clearer understanding of your past experiences.
- Give the writer a copy of your personal statement if you are applying to a graduate program. This statement will give the writer a clear idea of your future goals.
- Provide your writer with specific information about yourself that will help distinguish you from other candidates (e.g., awards, travel experiences, volunteer and internship experiences).
- Provide your writer with a copy of your transcript.
- Provide your GRE scores if you have taken the exam.
- Supply the writer with specific information about the program(s) to which you are applying. Provide your writer with a list that clearly shows each school and the deadline for receipt of the letter.
- Graduate schools are moving toward online applications, which may require you to register those writing a letter on your behalf. Systems vary, but most will email the writers with the instructions on submitting their letters via the online system. Be sure to check with your schools to confirm their process.
- In some cases, you may find schools that still allow paper submissions. Be sure to include reference forms (if required by a particular graduate program) along with stamped and addressed envelopes. Give the writer the specific date the recommendations are due. Make sure to fill out and sign any relevant sections of these forms.
- Waive your right of access to read your letter. Graduate schools place more emphasis on confidential letters.
- Include a job description or summary if the recommendation is for a job.
- Send a thank you note to each writer. It is courteous to keep your references informed of your application process.
- If you are uncertain about your graduate school plans, you can ask the faculty member if they would be willing to write a letter once you have determined your plans. You will need to stay in contact with the faculty member so you will know how to reach them once you need your letter. You may also ask a faculty member to write you a general letter of recommendation, but a letter tailored to the specific types of programs and shares a bit about what you've done after graduation is more compelling.
- Keep your letters organized and in a safe place. Good letters of recommendation take time to write and writers do not appreciate being asked numerous times to re-create letters that have been lost.

RESOURCES

Interfolio is a fee-based system if you are interested in electronically storing your letters of recommendation. For more information, visit <http://www.interfolio.com/>

**For other tips & questions contact the CDO at 410-337-6191 or
visit the CDO website at www.goucher.edu/cdo**