



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Proper Etiquette for Asking for a Letter of Recommendation

Why write a letter of recommendation?

Letters of recommendation are required for many applications, and following the right steps in asking for a recommendation is an important part of a successful application. When comparing applicants, if all other things are equal, a good recommendation letter can make the difference in securing the job, internships or spot in the graduate program that you want. It may be difficult to know exactly what to do and when to do it, so below is a list of the “DO’s and DON’Ts” to consider when requesting letters of recommendation.

DO!

- Go to someone with whom you have established a relationship. The people who know you best will write the best recommendation. Also, keep in mind that good recommendations have rich examples.
- Work to establish relationships well before the letter of recommendation is needed. The recommendation will often need to be from a professor, so make yourself known by sitting in the front row of the class, attending office hours, and taking multiple classes with the same professor. Taking on a position in a research lab would also provide an opportunity to establish a relationship with a professor or graduate student. Scheduling appointments with your departmental academic advisor and counselor/advisor in the Office of Student and Career Development can also help develop strong relationships.
- Schedule an in-person meeting to make the request for a recommendation. Provide copies of any materials that will allow the potential recommender to know more about you and to best evaluate you. This could include a personal statement for graduate school, papers or tests you completed while in the recommender’s class (if you’re asking a professor), a resume, cover letter and/or the position listing.
- Always give the recommender advance notice. Writing a quality letter takes time! Good rule of thumb: give a minimum of two weeks notice, but more time is better. It’s also important to check in on how the letter is coming, but make sure to do so in a respectful manner.
- Be polite, they’re doing you a favor.
- If your recommendations are being sent via mail, provide stamped and addressed envelopes to your recommender.
- Be sure to properly thank the recommender after they have submitted your letter! You can never go wrong with a hand-written thank you note.

DON’T!

- Assume they can write you a good recommendation. Ask not only if they can write you a recommendation, but if they can write you a great recommendation.
- Ask to read what they write about you!
- Constantly pester the recommender with questions regarding when the letter will be done
- Assume that because they agreed to write you a letter once, they will continue to do so in the future. You must properly ask each time around!

