



## How to ask for a Reference Letter



It actually does matter whether or not a recommender remembers you well. Her ability to bring you to life in her recommendation letter will affect your chances of getting a job or getting into graduate school, of being accepted into

a Study Away program or selected for that coveted internship. This is why **how** and **when** you ask your recommenders for their letters is very important.

These are some important steps to take into consideration as soon as you anticipate needing a reference letter.

### Plan ahead

- At a minimum, you should give your recommenders a month's advance notice.
- Ideally, you should give your recommenders about two to three months advance notice. This will not only make it easier for them to write the letter, but it also demonstrates that you are planning ahead and have thought carefully about your application process.
- Sometimes this isn't possible for a number of reasons, perhaps you found out about a great job or internship two weeks before the deadline. In that case, you should still ask. Apologize for the short notice in your email, make sure to follow all the steps we detail below, and be prepared to have to ask a number of recommenders since the first one might not have time to write your letter on such short notice.
- It is always good to have a list of about five potential recommenders, in case you need more than three (the usual) and in case one or two of them are unavailable.

## **BYOM: Bring your own materials**

Ideally, you should make an appointment to ask your recommenders for a letter. But if you're doing so electronically, make sure to explain where you are applying to, when the deadline is, and what you would need from them. Once they have agreed to write your letter, send them an email that includes:

- Resume or CV
- Any materials that will help her/him write a detailed and specific letter for you (e.g., essays you wrote for their classes, documents you might have created as part of your job). These materials should be exemplary and speak of your best work. So it might be a good idea if you ask the recommended for ideas on which to send her/him.
- Links to the programs, jobs, positions you are applying to.
- If you already have it, a sample of your personal statement or cover letter. If you don't, send them a paragraph where you describe your reasons to apply to the program, job, position, etc.
- **Cleary** specify deadlines for each program, job, etc. on your email.
- **Make sure to ask them if they need any other materials.**

If your application asks for reference letters to be mailed by post, as a minimum courtesy to your recommender, you should provide her/him with an envelope and a stamp with the address already written on it.

## **Should I send a reminder?**

- Yes. But one is enough. Send it a couple weeks before the letter is due.

## **Be grateful:**

- You should at the very least email your recommender to thank her/him once the deadline has past. (Hint: if they forgot to e/mail it, this will remind them).
- A card with a brief thank you is best.

**Good source with additional advice:** <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/6/>