

Rec Letters

Writing an excellent letter of recommendation is a time consuming process, but helping students secure opportunities outside of the classroom—study abroad, internships, jobs, fellowships, or graduate school admittance—is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job. If you think that you would like for me to write you a letter of recommendation, you should follow the following steps.

1. Read through the materials provided on this page, and make sure that you can get me all necessary information **AT LEAST THREE WEEKS** before the deadline of the first letter that you need.

Send me an email with your request, a brief description of the opportunity, and what is required of me as a letter writer. I will let you know that I can either write a “strong” letter, an “average” letter, or a “weak” letter. A strong letter will provide specific behavioral examples of your knowledge, skills and characteristics. An average letter will highlight your strengths and the context in which I’ve observed them, but may reveal that I have worked with you in a very limited capacity outside of the classroom environment. A weak letter indicates that I either feel I don’t know you well enough to provide sufficient information for a letter, or that I cannot strongly endorse you for the opportunity. These categories do not necessarily correlate to the grade you have received in my class, as **I factor in your effort, enthusiasm, attitude, maturity, and professionalism** into my recommendation. This is a reason why your professional behavior during the coursework matters. Note my emphasis, it is not just grades that matter when assessing the suitability of a candidate for higher studies/job position.

2. If you decide that you still want me to write you a letter, you need to send the following documents attached to a single email (preferred), or as a folder of paper copies delivered to my office in AC 03-326.

○ A. Cover Sheet

Please prepare a cover sheet that includes the following information. The more clearly you present this information, the more likely I am to avoid making any mistakes that will slow down the process.

1. The deadline by which the graduate school or employer must receive my letter, Where the letter is to be sent (i.e., the employer or graduate school or to you) and how it is to be sent
2. Whether there is a form that I must complete in addition to my letter, and

3. The specific graduate program (e.g., Ph.D. in political science) or job (e.g., congressional intern) for which you are applying.

If I am to return the letter to you, please provide a blank envelope for each letter. If I need to mail the letter, please also provide a stamped, addressed envelope for each letter I need to send.

4.If you took classes with me, **tell me the course name and the grade you earned in those. If you are currently in one of my classes**, tell me that as well. Do not send me a transcript and ask me to figure it on your behalf. Tell me the key information from the transcript.

5. Most applications nowadays are online. I prefer to submit letters on your behavior using my institutional email.

- **B. Information Sheet for a Letter of Recommendation**

The best letters provide evidence to support the writer's claims about the applicant. Therefore, I need to know how you perceive your strengths, why you think you are a good fit for the opportunity, and how you distinguish yourself from other applicants. Keep in mind you are not the only one applying for the position. You will be judged relative to the applicant pool. If you and your friend are using me as the same referee, I am effectively evaluating both of you relatively to each other.

- **C. Resume** (a standard one to three page version is fine)

- **D. Draft versions of the materials you are submitting**—cover letters, statements of interest, writing samples, etc.

- **E. All of the recommendation forms you have received from your potential employers or graduate programs.** If there are no official forms, then print out or take a screen shot of the webpage that has the information required in the letter. Make sure to fill in all parts of the forms that are your responsibility. **If there is space to indicate this, you should waive your right to see the letter.** This allows me to be as candid as possible. Furthermore, from the admission committee perspective, non-confidential letters are always considered weak signals.

- **F. If you have been in my class, one of your graded writing assignments.** You can scan this and email it to me, or make me a photocopy, but I do not want your original work. If you have not been in my class, please do the same with a paper for another class (no more than 5-6 pages).

3. Send me a reminder email one week before the deadline. I will confirm with you once I have submitted the letter.

4. There has been a surge in recommendation requests this year (I wonder why?). **To manage the surge, you must send all your requests in one go.** That is, do not send a letter request in week X, another in X+2, a third in X+3 and so on. Instead **send all requests in one batch on the same day (after I agreed to be your referee)**. Students who do not do this are effectively signaling their lack of organization. If you do not follow this rule, I will submit one round and simply stop after that. Afterall, I have to prioritize students who understand professional norms.