

Tips for requesting letters of recommendation from professors

Professors write many letters for a number of types of positions for people. To maximize their efficiency and to help them write the best letter for *you*, here are some basic tips to ensure things go more smoothly:

Initially requesting a letter:

1. You should give your professor 6-8 weeks advanced notice if you need a letter.

Hopefully you have made an effort to get to know the professor because they can't really write much that is useful for your application if they don't know you.

2. It is best to request a letter in person, in office hours. Because professors teach a lot of students, they don't always associate a face with the person emailing. If email is necessary, please include a picture and be sure to tell the professor what grade you got in their class.

3. Be sure to tell the professor what you are applying for, why it is important to your future goals, and when the letter is due.

4. If the professor agrees, be sure to ask if they have specific instructions to follow or if they want specific documents. (Remember professors write letters for a lot of students, so make everything as *easy as possible* for them.)

Submitting information for the letter writer:

- Some professors will have their specific instructions. Find out what they want BEFORE sending them a bunch of emails. In general, professors want only ONE email from you. Professors can't manage your documents in numerous emails because, remember, they are writing many of these letters for other students too.
- In addition to only wanting ONE document about you, professors only want to upload this letter once. Thus, if you might need this letter sent to multiple places or might want the letter in a year or two, it is best to use a letter writing service. Interfolio (<http://www.interfolio.com>) is an easy site for professors to use (it will cost you about \$19/year). All your letter writers upload to this site and then you can send them out without being able to read their content.

What should be in the document you provide to your professor? See the next page.

Your document for your letter writer should be a .doc with your name in the file name and should include:

1. Your name. Your current year. What profession/position/program you are applying for (very short description here, you can expand more later).
2. The due date for this letter.
3. Include a picture of yourself. Some professors teach hundreds of students per semester, and might need a picture to ensure they have the right person.
4. Academics: What is your major? What classes and in what semesters did you have this professor? What grades did you get?
5. Copy and paste from Connect Carolina all of your courses and grades. Highlight this professor's course. Professors like to see what kind of student you are overall. And, they might like to see what else you took while you took their class.
6. Write a paragraph telling me what specific aspects of **your association with the professor** you would like him or her to elaborate on in the letter. Describe situations where they observed the traits/attributes that you expect them to describe in the letter. (*Examples: We had a great chat during office hours about the development of your critical thinking skills in independent research, you worked on a mission trip abroad where you demonstrated your fundamental caring for others about which we talked at length, we worked together on a committee where you demonstrated your collaborative spirit and your adherence to detail and deadlines*). If you can't think of interactions where you demonstrated attributes of value in a recommendation, it's unlikely they will be able to.
7. Give more detailed information describing **what** you are applying for and at least one paragraph telling **why** this position appeals to you. Be sure to include the names of institution(s)/programs you are applying for. (*Examples: UNC Study Abroad program in London, Research Experience for Undergraduates at the University of Arizona*)
8. List the attributes you think the program is looking for (*ex: leadership, enthusiasm, critical thinking, maturity, independence etc*). Beside each one, tell the professor what evidence you present of these attribute. *Ex: Interpersonal skills--I waited with patients in the ER to help calm them down.*
9. Describe how the professor was able to observe these qualities that you would like him or her to write about.
10. List any other information that would be helpful for me to include that gives your

application context (*i.e. I had a medical issue in my third semester, I am a transfer student and I found the transition to UNC Biology difficult because, I am from rural NC, I am a first generation student and not a native English speaker*)

11. List any standardized test scores if you have any to report and paste your personal statement in (single spaced) from your application if there is one. A rough draft would be fine for the purpose of professors getting to know you better and to see what else accompanies your application.

12. **Clearly list where the letter needs to go.** (Some programs will send each recommender an email with the link to upload letters. Others have a link but the requesting student must provide identifying information for appropriate uploading.) **And**, if you think you might need this **letter sent to multiple places** or you might need it in a year or two from now, then you should use **Interfolio (\$19/year at <http://www.interfolio.com>)**. Remember you should make it easy on the professor and uploading to multiple sites is not as easy as one site.

***Note: Be sure to sign the line that indicates you WAIVE your right of access to the letter. If you do not waive your rights to read the letter and forms, then the honesty of the letter will be in doubt. The letters and forms have little credibility if they are not confidential.*

13. Be sure to include your email and phone contact in case the professor needs anything else from you. If the letter is due within a week, it is okay to send a polite reminder, managing many students' due dates is difficult for professors.

After the letter has been submitted:

Remember to keep in touch by letting the professor know if/when you get into the program, so you can thank them. You can thank them in person, by formal (snail-mail) thank you note, or by email.

Professors can learn from you too, so if you had a good experience, say on a study abroad trip or in your summer program, professors would likely to hear about that too.