

Securing Strong Letters of Recommendation

Making sure that you secure strong letters of recommendation is an important part of any application process. The following tips will help you ensure that your letters speak to your strengths in ways that enhance your application:

Before asking someone to write a recommendation, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Can this person enthusiastically endorse me?
2. Will this person be able to recall *significant details* about me and my work?
3. What specific recommendations does the application require? (faculty member, supervisor, character reference?)
4. Given these requirements, is this the best person to write the letter?
5. Who else is writing recommendations for me, and how will the letters complement each other?

Use the following tips when asking someone to write the recommendation:

1. Allow at least two (2) weeks for the letter to be written. Ideally three to four (3-4) weeks notice will allow the writer to think carefully about what they will include in your letter.
2. Send an email to the individual asking them if they can write a detailed letter that enthusiastically supports your application. If they say no, or seem lukewarm in their response, find someone else to write the letter.
3. Offer to meet with them in person before they write the letter, if they would like.
4. Once they agree to write the letter, provide the letter writer with a complete description of the program you're applying to, a copy of your personal statement, and a copy of your resume.
5. If you are asking for more than one letter, develop and share with your letter writers a document that includes the following information for each letter:
 - a. Description of the program
 - b. Description of the process for submitting the letter, including mailing addresses and web links
 - c. Clearly listed due dates

Be sure to express appreciation for letters of recommendations:

1. At a minimum, send an email to the letter writer expressing your gratitude for their time on your behalf.
2. A hand-written note goes a long way in helping someone feel appreciated.
3. Once you know the outcome of your application, be sure to share it with your letter writers. If they are invested in you, they will appreciate knowing what your next steps will be.