

## Recommendation Letter Request Etiquette

### When are references and recommendation letters used?

Most of the time when you apply for a job, you will be asked to provide references rather than recommendation letters. Employers utilize references towards the end of the interview process to help them decide which candidate to hire.

Recommendation Letters are often used when applying for further education (i.e., graduate school) or for scholarships, fellowships or prestigious rotational programs. It is possible for a job application to ask for a recommendation letter, but it is less common.

### Who you should ask?

The most important thing to consider when figuring out who to ask is how well they know you. A good recommendation letter is written with detailed examples that demonstrate the skills the employer/selection committee is hiring for. Having a well-known industry professional/ professor write your recommendation is only helpful if they know you well.

### How to ask someone for a letter

No one is obligated to write you a recommendation letter, which is why it is important to ask if they are willing. Once you have selected who you will ask to write you a recommendation letter, contact that person. Whether you are emailing your request or asking on the phone or in person, it is important to provide information that will help the recommender write a strong letter and thank them for their consideration.

Your request should include information about what you are using the recommendation letter for, why you are applying and what aspect of your experience working with them demonstrate the skills that need to be discussed in the letter. It is also useful to attach your resume to the email so that the recommender can see what else you have done in your career so far.

In addition to providing information about you for the letter, you also should explain the logistics of the recommendation. Prepare them for the process by explaining what they will be asked to do (Will they have to write a letter? Fill out a form? Etc.) and when/how it needs to be submitted. Give the recommender time to write the letter, letting them know the last minute (anything less than a week before it is due) will usually result in a lower quality letter if they are even willing to write it all.

### Following up

Once the letter is written, you should send a thank you note to your recommender for their time and their help. It is customary to give the recommender updates on your application and let them know when you hear back regarding the results of your application.

## Additional Advice

- Some recommenders prefer being asked in person and have an email after the initial ask with more details about the application. If you are asking a professor, visiting their office hours is a good way to ask first.
- You should not ask to see a copy of the letter. You often have to waive the right to see the letter before it is submitted. Some recommenders may choose to share a copy of the letter with you, but they are not required to do so.
- The recommender is putting their reputation on the line by writing you a letter. Some people may not be willing to do that if they don't know you well enough or if they don't think you would be a good fit for the role.

## Sample recommendation letter request email

On Tue, Jan 7 at 2:26 PM <Student@bu.edu> wrote:

Dear Professor X,

I hope you have been well since we last spoke. I wanted to let you know that I was really inspired after taking your screenwriting class and it has led me to decide to pursue further education so that I can apply that creativity to animated films. I am in the process of applying for my MFA. My application requires a recommendation letter from a professor, and since I obtained an A in your class, I was wondering if you would be willing to write a recommendation about me for my application.

If you were willing to write this for me, the application is due February 8<sup>th</sup> which provides four weeks to complete the letter. I would also be happy to meet with you at a time that works best if you would like to learn more about why I am applying to the program and what skills make me a good fit for it.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing back regarding your decision.

Best,  
Student Y