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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are used to apply for graduate and professional schools and some types of employment. Most graduate programs require 3 to 5 letters of recommendation. A faculty member in your department is usually the best reference for graduate school, but letters from non-classroom experiences such as internships, volunteer experiences, and research projects can also be used. Select someone who can evaluate your past performance, character and skills in a fair and accurate manner.

GUIDELINES

Securing a strong letter of recommendation can be easily done by following these guidelines:

1. Request your recommendation well in advance of the due date. References will appreciate having as much time as possible to prepare your letter.
2. Choose someone who will write a strong recommendation. If you are uncertain, ask the individual what type of reference they can provide. If they don't feel comfortable writing your reference they may suggest that you find someone else to write it. It is in your best interest to do this.
3. Give your writer a copy of your resume. This will provide the writer with a clearer understanding of your past experiences.
4. Give the writer a copy of your personal statement if you are applying to a graduate program. This statement will give the writer a clear idea of your future goals.
5. Provide your writer with specific information about yourself that will help distinguish you from other candidates (e.g., awards, travel experiences, volunteer and internship experiences).
6. Provide your writer with a copy of your transcript.
7. Provide your professional exam scores if you have taken the exam.
8. Supply the writer with specific information about the program to which you are applying.
9. Include reference forms (if required by a particular graduate program) along with stamped and addressed envelopes. Give the writer the specific date the recommendations are due. Make sure to fill out and sign any relevant sections of this form.
10. Provide your writer with a list of all letters to be sent along with the deadline for receipt.
11. Determine if the letters of recommendation are to be included with your application or sent directly to the graduate school.
12. Waive your right of access to read your letter. Graduate schools place more emphasis on confidential letters.
13. Include a job description or summary if the recommendation is for a job.
14. Send a thank you note to each writer. It is courteous to keep your references informed of your application process.
15. If you are uncertain about your plans, you can either ask a faculty member to write you a general letter of recommendation or you can ask the faculty member if they would be willing to write a letter once you have determined your plans. If you elect to go this route, you will need to stay in contact with the faculty member so you will know how to reach them once you need your letter.
16. Keep your letters organized and in a safe place. Good letters of recommendation take time to write and writers do not appreciate being asked numerous times to re-create letters that have been lost.

RESOURCES

The following are available if you are interested in electronically storing your letters of recommendation.

<http://www.interfolio.com/>

<http://www.referencenow.com/>

Source: University of California, San Diego *Career Services Center*