

## YOU'D LIKE A RECOMMENDATION?

A recommendation is needed when a university, employer, or other entity requests one. Some organizations will require a letter, some require the recommender fill out a form, and some require both. Some will not require a letter but rather will contact a recommender to talk about a candidate.

Most recommenders are asked to provide many recommendations throughout the year and there are especially busy times when we are writing many letters for many people. Your thoughtfulness and careful preparation will help your recommender be able to write the best letter possible to help you. Remember, that *the person requesting the recommendation must take responsibility and initiative* in the process. **Although recommenders will vary in their preferences, here are some general guidelines to follow:**

### A. ASKING THE RECOMMENDER

#### 1) Ask the recommender in person when possible.

- "Ask"- no recommender owes you a recommendation. You are requesting assistance, thus make this in the form of a request.
- Be willing to take "no" for an answer ("no" is to your advantage if the person cannot write in a timely way, or write a favorable or specific recommendation)
- "In person"- do not put the request under an office door, leave in a mailbox, or grab the recommender in the hallway. Ask the recommender when they will have time to discuss this with you, preferably during their posted office hour. Obviously sometimes we need to do this by phone or email and recommenders understand that. In person is best when you can do it.

#### 2) Ask if the recommender would be able to provide a *favorable* recommendation.

- If the recommender cannot honestly provide a favorable recommendation, you will want to find another person who will.

#### 3) Ask if the recommender would be able to provide a *specific* recommendation.

- If the recommender does not know you well enough to be specific in their comments, the recommendation will not do you much good anyway. Ask someone else.

### B. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO TO PREPARE THE RECOMMENDER

#### 1) Allow ample time for the recommender to write the letter.

- At least *two weeks* or more should be allowed.

#### 2) Provide the recommender with *all* the relevant forms and instructions at one time.

- Find out how your recommender wants to receive the materials. They may ask you to send all materials electronically or on hard copy. If they want to materials in hard copy, put them in a large labeled envelope (your name and phone number) so the materials will not get lost.
- Whatever you do, *send this all at one time* in as few documents/attachments as possible.
- If requesting a multiple letters, make these requests in *batches* as much as possible.

#### 3) Provide explicit instructions on sending the recommendation.

Recommendation letters are submitted in a large variety of ways. Make sure your recommender has *all* the information s/he needs, provided in as clear a way possible.

- Include a cover sheet with a table summarizing:
  - a) *To whom letters written*: Title of person/committee, complete address (even if letter is sent via email). Check to make sure all information is correct
  - b) *Submission details*: (i) hard copy snail mail, (ii) email (provide name, email address), (iii) will be prompted to submit via an organization's website, (iv) letter given to candidate (specify format), (v) no letter at present but writer may be contacted, (vi) other (give complete information)
  - c) *Due date* (first letters due at the top)

- If the recommendation is to be mailed, offer to provide the recommender with an addressed envelope for each recommendation. *Type/print* the correct address on each envelope (ask for university envelopes if they are needed). Some recommenders will not want/need envelopes—just ask.
- If the recommendation is to be submitted electronically, get your recommender the details they need, including how to access the link or the email address. Send recommender same submission details as above.

### **3) If there is a form for the recommendation, get that to the recommender at the time of request**

- If the organization provides a form for the letter, get the form to the recommender.
- *Print or type* your information on *all* forms (handwriting appears unprofessional).

### **4) Provide the recommender with your c.v./resume and statement of your goals.**

- *In addition to sending your resume*, remind the recommender of your major(s) and minor(s), classes you took from the recommender and when, and grade received in those classes.
- Provide the recommender with any information about your participation in the class, projects completed, etc. Help the recommender recall your class performance in as much detail as possible if they do not know you well or if time has elapsed since they worked with you.
- If time has elapsed or you were in a large class, ask the recommender if they would like a photo of you to jog their memory.
- Remind the recommender about relevant experiences, internships, research projects, grants etc. they can highlight. Stress especially leadership positions held and awards won.
- Provide the recommender with information on some of your relevant activities, Provide the recommender with a statement of your goals and/or reasons for choosing the university/job/conference/award/fellowship for which you are applying.

## **D. FOLLOW UP WITH THE RECOMMENDER**

- *Politely check* with the recommender *a few days before the deadline*. Don't be shy about this—we do forget, website address is buried in our inbox or does not arrive. It is *your* job to make sure recommendation has been sent. Help recommenders help you.
- If recommenders let you know letters have been sent, make a note of it and don't include them on a blanket reminder to all recommenders

## **E. THANK RECOMMENDERS**

- Recommendations take time, thought, and effort. Let the recommender know you appreciate the effort made on your behalf (send a note)
- Let your recommenders know what happened with the position/award in a timely way

## **F. DO STUDENTS RECEIVE COPIES OF RECOMMENDATIONS?**

### **1) Each recommender has their own on giving students copies of the recommendations.**

- Ask the recommender about their practice, if you desire a copy.

### **2) Some processes require letters are open or closed**

### **3) Some recommenders will discuss their recommendations with you after they are written.**

- You may ask the recommender if s/he would be willing to discuss the letter with you.