

# REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

**Guys:** please note that I provide letters of recommendation for academic purposes only. I do not provide “personal” recommendations (usually requires a very *intimate* knowledge of your character/ personality).

To start with, a **strong word of advice:** Do NOT commence your request by sucking up with praises to the effect that I am one of the greatest teachers you have come across in your life. Really? I find such an approach **extremely** irritating. (If you genuinely believe I am a great teacher then you should have indicated so in other avenues.) A much better approach is to explain to me how you did in my classes and **why** you feel I am one of the teachers who is well placed to write you a letter of recommendation.



You should understand that a teacher is **not** obligated to write a letter of recommendation for a student. ← *Read this statement again.* In other words, if a teacher agrees to provide a letter of recommendation then it is a favor to the student. Letters of recommendation are in reality letters of trust: the student trusts that the teacher writing the letter will do so with honesty and without any malicious bias; the teacher trusts that the student is serious about his/her academic ambitions; and the person(s) receiving the recommendation trust that the teacher wrote an *honest* letter of recommendation.

**NOTE:** If your classroom behavior had often been disruptive or rude or had involved ignoring multiple requests not to use your electronic devices or not to leave the class in the middle of proceedings, and so on, I will still write you a recommendation. Aren't I nice? . . . However, I will, write about this behavior in the recommendation. Going stupid on teachers is not the best way to build a reputation for professionalism. To quote the English professor in the item on arrogance and absence of manners in this



readings packet: "Some students imagine they will advance on the basis of having a degree, even if their words and manners indicate that they are unsuitable for any kind of job that involves dealing with people. They seem completely unaware that knowing how to behave will have a serious impact on their future prospects."

## Academic Attributes

From the perspective of the recommender, you may further wish to note, writing a recommendation is not an easy task. To give you some idea of what is involved, consider this: **in addition** to comments about your general performance in class, on tests and exams, the grade you received, and your overall GPA, here is a list of academic attributes about you that, typically, schools would like a recommender to provide, *to the extent possible*:

- For how long has the teacher known the student;
- Is the student a critical thinker and problem solver;
- Is the student intellectually curious;
- Is the student highly motivated;
- Can the student communicate effectively in writing (including the ability to synthesize information from different sources, and construct logical and cogent arguments);
- Does the student communicate well verbally;
- Is the student reliable and trustworthy;
- Does the student fulfill commitments to the best of her/his ability (including the pursuit of intellectual rigor);
- Does the student manage work and time efficiently (including handing in assignments on time);
- Is the student emotionally stable;
- Can the student work well with people who hold alternative viewpoints or who are from different cultural backgrounds;
- Does the student have the ability to surmount personal difficulties and obstacles;



- Does the student demonstrate initiative when required;
- **Does the student demonstrate professionalism;**
- Does the student demonstrate high ethical standards;
- Does the student have realistic objectives;
- Does the student take constructive criticism well; and
- Does the student follow advice?



## Requirements

I often receive requests for letters of recommendation from students. (By the way, keep this fact in mind: people are very suspicious of recommendations that come only from outside your major/minor departments.) To handle these requests, I have instituted the procedure indicated below. This procedure aims to simultaneously accomplish three things: first, that I treat every request fairly (that is, without regard to class, race, sex, religion, etc.). Second, that the overall tone of the recommendation is a positive one (even if it turns out that I may have to indicate reservations on some aspect(s) of your academic potential). Third, that the value of my letters of recommendation are not compromised in any way by ensuring respect for my reputation (among those to whom the recommendations are sent) as a person who writes *honest and useful* letters of recommendation.

Therefore, in order for me **to even consider** writing you a letter of recommendation, you must meet the following criteria:

- 1.** You must be a major or minor in any of the programs that make up the department in which I teach (I will waive this requirement if you have taken more than two courses with me).
- 2.** Your overall GPA must NOT be less than **3.0** (Yes, I know GPAs do not indicate how intelligent you are, but that is the only "objective" criterion available that provides some indication of a student's academic potential--especially from the perspective of knowledgeability.)
- 3.** You must have completed at least **TWO** courses with me. Think about it: If you were the person *receiving* the recommendation, would you trust it from a teacher with whom the student

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completed only ONE course, when the student has done several courses with other teachers? Unless, however, it was a special type of course--such as an independent study. If you are currently in the middle of a second course with me, I will consider writing you a recommendation depending upon how you are doing in the course.

4. You must have received the grade of **A** or **A-** in at least one course and no less than a **B+** in the other course(s).

5. If you are applying for graduate school, then I must be satisfied with your **personal statement** (but only from the perspective of how well it is written).

6. If you are a former student of one or more years past, you have continued to stay in touch by keeping me informed, on a regular basis, of your academic progress (as well as any relevant extra-curricular activities you have been engaged in). One point though: if you have been studying at some other school why aren't you asking your teachers there for recommendations?

7. If you meet the above criteria, *and if* I agree to write you a recommendation, then you must do the following:

(a) E-mail me your AAR HUB report OR come to my office and pull it up on my computer. **Reminder:** all your e-mails to me must begin with a proper salutation and closure, as was indicated in the syllabus; specifically, *Dear Dr...* and *Sincerely, ...* **Failure to adhere to this protocol may lead to no response from me; moreover, it will be considered as a negative attribute about you from the perspective of professionalism.**

(b) Write me a brief note explaining clearly what your short term and long term academic goals are.

(c) Provide me with a current resume or CV (does NOT have to be in a proper or formal style.) Your resume or CV will help me to write you a letter of recommendation that highlights your achievements. Duh!

(d) Provide me with a copy of your personal essay/statement (does not have to be the final version) that graduate schools require.

(e) Provide me with the names/ addresses of the person(s) to whom the recommendation should be sent.

**WARNING:** Do not, under any circumstances, indicate on any application material (online or print) that I am your recommender before you have obtained permission from me to do so. ←*Read this warning again.* Otherwise, I will reject your request.



## A question

A question that students, every now and then, ask me (usually it is ones who are, I suspect, somewhat lazy). It goes like this:

**Q.** But other teachers do not ask for all this. How come you do?

**A.** Really? Hmm... May be you should go to them for a recommendation. Yes?

NOTE: If you are one of those who will also be studying to take a standardized test like the LSAT, GRE, etc. you may also want to look at this document [here](#).

### KNOWLEDGEABILITY

Sticking to working class intellectual habits while aiming for a bourgeois lifestyle is highly unlikely to produce the desired outcome, especially in a capitalist society like this one.