

HOW TO ASK FOR A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION



DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

Department of Sociology

Plan Ahead

Ask early, at least 1 month before the deadline (ask earlier if possible). It takes time to write a strong, effective letter of recommendation. This is not something you want written at the last minute, so give plenty of advance notice. (If you ask at the last minute or give too-little advance notice, it is likely you will have difficulty finding someone who will agree to write a letter). It is possible that not every person you ask to write a letter will agree to write one or be able to write one, so be sure to have more people in mind than you actually need so you have a back-up.

Get Organized

When are the letters due? Are they submitted along with all the other application materials or are they submitted separately? Are the letters submitted online or via regular mail? Are there any forms the letter writer is expected to fill out? There's a lot to keep track of when submitting an application that requires letters of recommendation, so pay attention to these details. It's your responsibility to fully inform your letter writer of everything they need to know regarding submission.

Each institution/program to which you are applying may have a different deadline. Write down this down and give it to your letter writer (or email it). The more organized you are, the smoother things will go. You should make this process as easy as possible for your letter writer (they are, after all, doing you a favor).

Choosing Your Letter-Writer

Letters of recommendation are only worthwhile if they effectively elucidate your qualities and qualifications that are relevant to the program or institution to which you are applying. This means you should ask someone who knows you really well and who is familiar with your work/accomplishments in the field. For M.A. and Ph.D. programs, you must get letters from faculty in that field. For professional programs (e.g. law school, public health, business, social work) you might get letters from individuals who supervised you in an internship in that field.

What to Provide Your Letter-Writer

- **A C.V. or resume.** If you need help putting this together, the Career Center can help you (they have great online resources, too).
- **A list of classes** you've taken with him/her and the grades you received in each class
- **A polished personal statement and/or statement of purpose** (for graduate school applications) or a polished description of your qualifications related to the institution/program and an explanation of why you are applying
- **Any forms or cover sheets** that the letter writer is asked to fill out, e.g. graduate schools sometimes ask that faculty fill out a "ranking" form to submit along with the letter.
- **The submission deadline(s) for each letter.** If the letter is to be mailed, provide a stamped envelope with the mailing address. If the letter is to be submitted electronically, provide clear instructions on how the letter should be submitted.

Write a Thank You Note

Writing a letter of recommendation is time-consuming and letters are usually due during the busiest time of the quarter, so it's nice to show your appreciation by saying "thank you".