

Guidelines:Letters of Recommendation¹

I view my responsibility to provide well-written and informative letters as a service to both my students and the recipients of those letters. I am happy to write letters for students that have taken at least two courses with me. However, in order to best serve both groups, I have established the following guidelines. Before you request a letter of recommendation from me, you should be aware that:

- While I view writing recommendations as a service I provide to students, I will be honest in my letters. Generally speaking, this means that if you performed well in my class, particularly on writing assignments and class discussion, my letter will reflect this. If you engaged in an independent study or research project with me and showed initiative and promise in conducting research and use of various research methods, my letter will reflect this. Alternatively, if you rarely attended class, performed poorly on assignments, sat silently during discussion, turned in assignments late, and/or failed to complete the necessary tasks, my letter will reflect this.
- If I feel that I cannot write a strong and positive letter of recommendation, I will tell you this. Refusal to write you a letter is also a service to you. You should be seeking out the best possible letter writers. If I do not feel I can write you a strong and positive letter, it is only fair that you are aware of this so you can find a better option. Letters of recommendation are a signal to potential employers, directors of graduate programs, etc. about the potential of a future employee or students. Writing inaccurate or disingenuous letters weakens the signal provided by the letter and decreases the usefulness of letters in general as a signal. In addition, an inaccurate or disingenuous letter would also weaken my credibility on future letters for other students.
- I can only comment on skills and attributes that I have observed. My ability to comment on such things increases as the number of our interactions increase. It is virtually impossible to write a good letter for someone who has not completed at least two courses with me. In most circumstances, it is best to ask for a recommendation from a faculty member that you have taken at least two classes with or with whom you have worked on a research project.
- The quality of my letter is in part reflect the level of detail you provide in the requested materials listed below.
- You will need to provide me with the materials requested below **three weeks** before the letter's due date. Please do not ask me to write a letter for you until you have taken the time to write your personal statement and gather the necessary materials.

If, after reading the above items, you still wish to request a letter of recommendation from me, please provide me all of the following materials at least three weeks prior to the letter's due date:

1. Personal statement or statement of purpose. Most scholarship, internship, graduate/law school applications require a statement of your goals/reason for applying. You should share the statement you compose with me. It will help me customize my letter. If the program/honor does not require such a statement, you should compose an equivalent statement and provide it to me.

¹These guidelines are modeled after Owsiak's guidelines (2012)

2. A current copy of your resume. Please note any particular items that you feel make you a particularly strong candidate for the position/program/award.
3. An unofficial copy of your transcript. Please highlight or underline the courses you took with me.
4. Any information (more than just web links) about the program to which you are applying, and a short written explanation of why various attributes of that program are particularly relevant for you and your interests. (Please note, this kind of information should also be included in your personal statement.)
5. A list of programs to which letters must be sent. This list should include due dates for each letter, as well as instructions for submission (e.g. whether the letter will be submitted to an online repository or should be sent as a hard copy). The list should also include any other relevant information — email or mailing address, type of degree program, submission to an online repository, etc.
6. Any other necessary forms that require my attention. Be sure to identify which forms go with which applications. For any applications that require basic information about me, please complete those sections using the following contact information:

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Finally, please keep me posted on what happens. If I write you a letter, you can rest assured that I am eager to hear about your success.