

Foster Care to Academic Success

How to Ask for Letters of Recommendation

It's that time of year...the school year is in full swing but you're also starting to make your plans for next summer or the next academic year! Are you planning to apply to graduate school and find yourself in need of a letter of recommendation to get accepted into your desired program of study? Maybe you're looking for an internship and you need a strong letter of recommendation to help you get selected for one of the few spots available.

The most important thing to remember is that you should be respectful and professional in making your request. What does this mean? Well, we'd like to share some information about what you should (and shouldn't) do when asking for letters of recommendation.

#1 Do your homework!

Start sooner rather than later and find out what your school, internship, or potential employer requires for a valid letter of recommendation. This information will likely be available online. Did you know that most schools require that letters of recommendation come to them in a ***sealed envelope with the recommender's signature across the seal***? There may be a form that your recommender is required to complete. If so, be sure to provide this documentation right away and don't expect your recommender to do the research for you! If you don't understand the requirements, ASK! Don't take a chance that your letter won't be accepted and your application deemed incomplete 😊

#2 Ask for a letter of recommendation from someone who knows what you can do.

It's likely that you'll be asking professors, supervisors or other professionals for your letters. To the best of your ability, **choose someone who knows you well**. If you need a letter that speaks to your ability to excel in a program, then the letter should be written by someone who has actually seen you do well! Graduate schools and employers review tons of these letters so ask someone who can write about your strengths and talents and not just a generic letter filled with meaningless details. If someone tells you that he/she cannot write you a letter, don't push it and accept their response.

#3 ASK, don't assume!

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Be sure to **ASK** if a professor, supervisor etc. would be willing to write a letter supporting your application to graduate school, for employment, or an internship etc. NEVER assume that an employer or supervisor will be willing to do this for you. Avoid email requests or catching a professor in the hallway after class. You should make a formal request either by making a phone call or better yet, by scheduling an appointment and asking in person! Additionally, before you list someone as a reference, ask for permission before doing so.

#4 Provide ample notice and a specific date for when you need your letter.

Give individuals at least one month's notice prior to date that you need your letter. Remember, it's likely that yours won't be the only letter that he/she is asked to write. A last minute request reflects poor planning and a lack of consideration for the recommender's time – these are **not** qualities that employers or graduate schools are looking for!

#5 Say thank you!

Be gracious and appreciative of the time and effort that an individual has put forth on your behalf. Most people who agree to write letters of recommendation take this responsibility very seriously and will often spend hours on just one letter! Be sure to send a written note of thanks in addition to making a phone call or sending an email.

#6 Get organized!

Provide background information and supporting materials about the opportunity that you are pursuing. Organize all of the materials that support your request into one package with your name and deadlines clearly identified – don't waste time your recommender's time by providing piecemeal information. Once an individual has agreed to write you a letter, you should give them the following:

- Name of the individual and/or program to whom the letter should be addressed as well as the full mailing address. Your recommender will need this to write a formal letter.
- Information about the graduate program, job or opportunity – a web link would be helpful or include copies of a brochure or application.
- Information about YOU – your updated resume, transcripts, any assignments that highlight your achievements or illustrate how you will excel in the program, job, internship etc. If you need a letter that speaks to specific qualities or your potential for success in particular career field, include a few bullet points. Don't be afraid to share with your recommender why this program, internship or job is

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a good fit for you. This will be very helpful to the recommender in drafting your letter.

- Any specific forms that the recommender must complete. If you are asked to waive your right to review the letter, it's a good idea to do so. These letters are often deemed more candid and are taken more seriously. Recommenders are generally more than willing to share a copy of their letters – just ask.
- If you are applying to more than one program and need multiple letters, bring all of your requests and the corresponding materials at the same time!
- Include pre-addressed envelopes with proper postage.

Remember that you are establishing yourself as a young professional and preparing to make a transition into the world of work. A big part of doing so involves communicating with and engaging others in a professional and appropriate manner. If you need additional information, please contact Foster Care to Success. We're always here to help!