



Securing Strong Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are an important part of your graduate school application.

- They are read, and who they come from and what they say is important.
- Letters should come from someone who knows you well and can evaluate your ability to be successful as a graduate student.
- For Ph.D. programs you will be asked to provide three or four letters and they should come from your faculty or research mentors.

Here are some things to think about as you prepare to ask someone to write you a letter:

1) Letter writers will be asked to provide feedback on your:

- intellectual capabilities;
- experimental abilities;
- fundamental training;
- creativity; and
- motivation to be successful as a graduate student.

Individually a letter might not address each of these points. However, collectively, the letters should provide a comprehensive view of your qualifications, albeit from various vantage points.

2) How do I ask someone to write me a letter?

- Ask well in advance and stay on top of reminders
- Make every effort to ask in person and always ask: Are you willing to write me a *supportive* letter of recommendation?
- Provide writers with:
 - a cover letter with your name, contact information, and 2-3 bullet points of what they might emphasize in the letter;
 - a list of schools to which you are applying and due dates;
 - your CV;
 - a draft of your statement of purpose; and
 - any helpful supporting documents (a copy of coursework, a paper, etc.)

3) Be sure to follow-up and stay in touch with your letter writers.

- Send a hand-written thank you note.
- Keep writers up-to-date on your acceptances and decisions.
- Be sure to nurture the relationship going forward since this is someone who should continue to be part of your academic journey.