

# Graduate Career Services

The Graduate School and Division of Student Affairs

## Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are an integral formality in any academic search, and you will commonly need to submit 3-4 letters per application. Begin the process at least two months in advance, and choose your recommenders wisely.

### Determining Who to Ask

Some of your letter writers will be obvious, such as your advisor or another faculty member or mentor with whom you have worked closely on your research. Consider choosing someone who is familiar with your academic performance and has witnessed your teaching abilities firsthand and can describe your interactions with students. A noted scholar and/or someone who might be well-known to the search committee and department can also add strength to your application, as long as they can speak directly *and positively* to your candidacy.

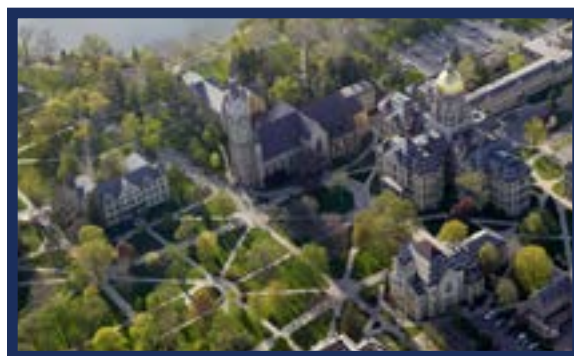
### Requesting the Letters

Approximately 2-3 months prior to when application submittals are due, reach out to your recommenders and let them know you will be applying for a specific opportunity. Indicate that you would greatly appreciate a letter of recommendation if they would be willing and able to write one, and, if so, you will follow up in a few weeks with more details. Touching base far enough in advance will provide the faculty with time to gather their thoughts, but also provide you with the chance to cultivate additional relationships if your initial inquiries don't work out.

For the faculty who agree to write a recommendation, contact them again *no less than three weeks* prior to your submission deadline. Try to give even more time if possible, and consider scheduling a meeting to discuss your experiences, professional goals, interest in the position, and particular reasons for requesting the letter from them rather than someone else (which can help them determine which aspects of your relationship they should focus on). Some faculty may have a base letter that they modify for each student, while others may write every letter anew.

**It can also be helpful to provide them with a copy of the following materials, even if they know you quite well already:**

- Up-to-date CV
- The cover letter for your application
- Research Statement, Teaching Philosophy, or any other supplemental application materials that may help convey your background and goals
- Your unofficial academic transcripts
- All the necessary links or forms, with all of your personal information already entered and as much of theirs as possible in order to reduce the administrative burden
  - If you cannot pre-fill the forms, provide your contact information and other required personal details in a document from which they can copy and paste.
- An informational letter describing when the recommendation letter is due, the submission instructions, and any other pertinent details
  - Ask them if there is any additional information you can provide, and if they would appreciate a reminder a week prior to the deadline



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## General Considerations

Faculty are extremely busy, and your letter may not be their top priority even if they are your advisor. Provide them with advanced notice, sufficient details on your background and interest in the position, and a clear effort to make the task not burdensome. Ask references to let you know when the letter has been completed. Consider sending reminder emails to those you have not heard from asking if additional information is needed.

Keep your recommenders updated as you advance through the application and interview process. Be sure to write a thoughtful thank-you note to acknowledge their time and effort.

Graduate Career Services offers an online dossier and personal website service through a partnership with Interfolio (<http://www.interfolio.com>), the premier online credential file management service for colleges and universities. *You as the student assume the fees.*

There may be a time when one of your recommenders is unable or unwilling to provide you with a positive reference. In those cases it is recommended that you have an honest conversation about the kinds of opportunities for which they would enthusiastically support your application.

Letters of recommendation can be considered either "open" or "confidential." Open letters provide you with the opportunity to view the contents, while confidential letters remain private and are sent directly to the search committee or institutions. If you have the choice between open and confidential, discuss the decision with your recommenders and consider the following factors before deciding which category to choose:

- Your confidence in the writer's willingness and ability to be positive and enthusiastic
- Your recommender's preferences
- The search committee's preferences

## DO

- Select references who know your academic performance and have seen your work ethic in action.
- Find out if your recommenders have specific recommendation policies, and follow them precisely.
- Seek their permission to be listed as a reference. Confirm they are both willing and able to provide you with a supportive recommendation.
- Send them the job description you are applying for.
- Provide them with your CV, cover letter, and supplemental application materials.
- Include the contact information of your references directly on your CV (but not on a resume).
- Keep your recommenders apprised of your progress periodically throughout your job search, and thank them for their contributions to your success.

## DON'T

- Include family members, relatives, partners, friends, or other personal connections and "character" references.
- Wait until the last minute to seek permission from your references. You may be left scrambling to find a great recommender, or they may not have time to fully prepare.