

Guidelines for Obtaining Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School

A critical component of an application is the recommendation letter. It provides insight from another person's perspective of your abilities and preparedness for the discipline.

Be selective regarding who might provide a useful evaluation to support your candidacy. Your best letters will come from individuals with whom you have developed repeated and close interaction. In addition to faculty, you may be allowed to include letters from advisors, employers, supervisors from internship and volunteer experiences, as well as professionals in your career interest area. Verify with programs you are applying to about what is permissible. Don't expect someone you barely know to be willing or able to provide substantial support. Start early in your college program to establish rapport and initiate ongoing interaction. Discuss your graduate plans and motivation and be open to suggestions of schools to consider. Stay in contact (office visits, LinkedIn connections, e-mail and other correspondence) to keep people up-to-date on your activities and accomplishments.

Always be considerate. Recommenders need time to write a quality letter. Yours may be placed in a queue among many other requests received at the same time of the year, and it may not necessarily be the one they are immediately working on. Don't spring this request on someone with short notice or during busy periods of the quarter. Provide adequate time for recommenders to meet your deadline. A two- to six-week window of time is suggested. Indicate the date you plan to apply by and check back weekly to assess their progress.

When meeting with those who have agreed to write a recommendation, assist their process by providing supportive information such as:

- a) a transcript of coursework and grades,
- b) examples of your work (papers, lab assignments),
- c) a CV or résumé to illustrate what you have done outside of their observation of you,
- d) a list of your extracurricular activities,
- e) a copy or draft of your personal statement,
- f) the reference form to be completed by the recommender along with your applicant portion already completed and signed. At times, a narrative letter may be substituted. See an example of WWU's Graduate Admissions Reference Form: <https://adobeformscentral.com/?f=wSzscel3gpnnfUPoR-Mltw#>,
- g) envelopes and stamps for returning materials to you or to the targeted schools, and
- h) note specific points you would like included, even though you know the writer is at liberty to write whatever he/she chooses.

Send your recommenders a written thank you once you know the recommendation has been submitted. For faculty, this serves as a helpful document to include in their performance reviews. And finally, inform your recommenders of your application outcomes.



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