

References and Letters of Recommendation

We think it's really important to support our students in finding jobs and internships, getting into graduate school, applying for scholarships, and more. One of the ways we often do this is by serving as references and/or writers of letters of recommendations. These are in addition to the work we usually have to do, and so often we do them at night, on the weekends, etc. and we tend to triage our work based on deadlines. If you'd like a letter from us (or for us to serve as a reference), please help us write/give the best one we can for you by providing all the necessary information in a timely fashion (the last thing you want is a grumpy letter writer!). As well, you can help us remember things to include in our letter – which can make it a better letter!

So, some info on both below:

- 1) **Serving as a reference:** This means that you'd like to put our name down on an application and we may get a call about you or need to write a letter at a later date. Be sure that you ask the person if they'd be willing recommend you in a positive fashion, and that they have agreed, before you list them as a reference. If they once served as a reference, but it's been a while since you've asked (e.g. you graduated a year ago), you may want to check again. It's good to include the general types of positions that you are applying for, how many, as well as (if you have a sense of it) what the person serving as a reference might expect (e.g. will they automatically get an email asking for a letter/to complete a questionnaire (if so, see below) or may they need to write a letter only if you make the short list, or they may get a call, etc.?)
 - a. If the reference has agreed, it's helpful to send some information about the positions you are applying to (description and link if possible), why you're interested/why you think you're a good fit (briefly is fine), and your most updated resume, so that if the reference gets a call, they can respond quickly and seem to have knowledge of your interest and this particular position (you were so excited about it that you told us!). Additionally, in this day and age of worries about identity theft, we probably won't respond to an inquiry about one of our students or alums if we don't know whether they have applied for it or not...it could be a phisher...
- 2) **Serving as a letter writer/questionnaire filler:** We take this very seriously and will take some time/focus to write your letter – trying to get the correct information about you as well as the position you are applying for. It is rarely quick and so we appreciate your understanding of that (and appreciation of the time we'll put in!).
 - a. **The first letter that we write for you takes the most time;** editing for each additional application takes less (unless we need to do a major re-write because it's been so long since we wrote for you). For this reason, it is good to ask people for letters *giving them at least three weeks notice before it's due* – they need to figure out how to fit writing this letter into their busy schedules. If it's less than three weeks because you just learned about an opportunity, and particularly if they've never written for you before, please be particularly appreciative (and understand that they may need to decline).
 - i. While there's some editing for each letter written, please don't worry if you ask for 2 or 5 or 10 letters in one shot - it's really the first one that will take the longest.
 - b. While we are sometimes delayed, we never decide not to reply to you. So, if you don't hear back from us in a reasonable amount of time about your request, please feel free to write again with a polite reminder (and don't interpret this as us not being willing to write you a letter! – just busy and triaging...and occasionally emails slip through the cracks!)
 - c. So, should you decide you'd like us to write a letter there are a few things we'll need from you (and adapt the below to your particular situation as necessary). These are listed below; some of these can be provided the same to all letter writers, others should be tailored for

each letter writer (e.g. you may want your letters to highlight different aspects of you, or your recommenders would know different aspects of your abilities/experiences, etc.).

If you'd like a letter of recommendation, please include:

- 1) **Necessary forms or web addresses to forms and DUE dates!!!** Due dates should be obvious and *in the actual email to your letter writer* (not only in an attachment). If you are applying to multiple things and have a list, list them *in order of their due dates*.
 - a. We will contact you when your letter goes out. If the deadline is approaching and you don't hear from your writer, this likely means that they have NOT sent it. SEND A REMINDER!!!! Do not be shy about this! But do keep in mind that we are basing timing on the deadline you gave, as we triage through all the tasks that we need to get done day to day (so if you need it sent earlier than the deadline, than that's not really the deadline you should have given us, right?).
- 2) **Where does the letter get sent to** (it will rarely be sent directly to you). Is there an email address? Will your letter writer receive an email from an organization? Is there a link that you need to provide for an online application?
- 3) **The address (and name) that the letter should be addressed to** (not necessarily the envelope...*the letter*). Preferably both. So, "Dear Whom???" and that address for the address line. EVEN if it's an online form...if we need to include the letter as an attachment, then it should have an address to make it formal. The exception to this is if the online form ONLY has questions that you can type or copy into, but no way to send an attachment.
- 4) **The web address of the place you're applying to and who you'd like to work with there/what you'd like to do, etc.** Not just for the application but for the job/organization description. This will help us to appropriately tailor your letter to the specific situation. It will take us a lot of time that we don't really have if we have to look up this information for every letter we write.
- 5) **Your current resume** (if you don't yet have one, than a description of the things that would go on a resume, even if it's not formatted yet)
- 6) **Anything that's not on your resume that you think might be good to mention** (or that *is* on your resume and you hope your letter writer could re-emphasize) that would be legitimate for your letter writer to mention (e.g. something they would know about you).
- 7) **Why you are applying to this particular job/field/program, etc.** What are your interests here? If there's different projects listed, which project(s) are you particularly interested in? How does it relate to your Ursinus/major/ and/or future goals?
- 8) **Copies (unofficial is fine) of your transcripts (or a summary of what classes you've taken and how you did) might be helpful if we don't have access to them** (If we're not your advisor currently (even if we were before you graduated), then we don't).
- 9) This is probably the hardest but can be important/helpful. Especially if it's been a long time since we've had you in class! **Please list some "writing points" that could be included in the letter that we could consider mentioning.** This means you have to forget modesty a bit. Specific examples of a behavior are good things to include in a letter, so if you can think of any we might not remember, please add those (You did this, and therefore that shows X type of personality, etc.). We may or may not include these things, but these writing points will help ensure a few things: a) That you and your letter writer are somewhere on the same page, b) you might remind us of things that we'd forgotten about or didn't think to include, c) you can let your writer know what types of stuff you'd like them, in particular, to mention (each recommender will know different things about you), and d) it's could be a way to include information that you may not have found a way to incorporate into your resume or the implications of something that is included in your resume.
- 10) **Remember to let us know how things turned out for you!**