

The Best Approach to Obtaining Letters of Recommendation

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1. **Start the process as early as possible!!** In the case of graduate schools, typical application deadlines are early in the calendar year of the year when you hope to begin (January or February of that year).
2. **Know exactly where you need to apply:** Not just the University, not just the Department, but the name of the person to whom the letter of recommendation is to be addressed (director of graduate study, specific professor in that university, etc.)
3. If you intend to apply to four or six programs - as you should - be sure to do the same for each of these programs, and to **have all that information gathered at the same time.**
4. Try to **secure at least one letter of recommendation from the faculty member at your college who knows the most about graduate schools** (this may be a professor who is not in your field). Get the best possible letters of recommendation you can. Good letters come from scholars who are likely to be known, to scholars with whom you hope to study or to the scholars on the admissions committee. If the professors in your department are not likely to be known in the university world, and if you should get a chance to study with known scholars, don't miss the opportunity. Not all of your letters are to come from faculty at your college.
5. **Find the most opportune time** to approach the person or persons from whom you want to obtain a letter of recommendation. This means avoiding registration time, the period of examinations, etc.
6. **Secure** an appointment with that person.
7. **Come to him/her armed with:**
 - a **list of the courses** you have taken in your major/s, along with the **grades** earned; a **list of your minor/s**;
 - a **transcript of your grades**, providing your overall **QPA**. A **resume/curriculum vitae**;
 - a **cover letter** (explaining why you want to pursue this field of study - why this specific university - why this specific department - why you feel particularly suited to this field), or a **statement of purpose**;
 - All the **forms** provided by the university to which you are applying. Also, make sure that all the sections that it is up to you to fill out are filled out - typed. Provide an **addressed envelope**. Don't forget to place **stamps** wherever stamps are needed. Indicate **the date** on which the recommendation is due;
 - honor societies to which you belong – your function/s in these societies;
 - awards that you have won;
 - work experience;
 - activities in which you have participated (and any offices held);
 - a description of your professional goals.

8. Avail yourself of the **Buckley Amendment**, a waiver form indicating whether or not you waive your right to see the letter of recommendation. There are important benefits in maintaining the confidentiality of letters. Selection committees tend to view confidential letters as having greater credibility and assign them greater weight; also, some letter writers actually feel less inhibited in their praise of students if the letter is confidential.

9. **Make sure that the professor has actually sent the material** by contacting him a week or so after the deadline. But, don't be obnoxious!!

10. **Don't multiply** recommendations beyond what is strictly necessary!

11. **Thank the person** who has recommended you - preferably in writing.

12. **Keep him/her informed of future plans**, and let him/her know whether you expect to need "more of the same" at a later date, so that he/she can keep the materials on file for further reference.