

Tips for Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

In the process of applying to a graduate school, or for an internship or a job, you may need to request a letter of recommendation from a faculty member. An online program is unique in that you will most likely never engage a faculty member face-to-face. Therefore, when you are choosing a faculty member for your request, make sure that the faculty member can write a letter that attests to specifics about your personal characteristics or accomplishments. Consider the following questions when choosing a faculty member, and keep these things in mind for future letters of recommendation:

- Does this faculty member know my name?
- Have I spoken with this faculty member outside of course-specific discussions?
- Did I receive a good grade in the course with this instructor?
- Have I taken more than one course with this instructor?

If you answered “No” to any of these questions, consider whether this instructor is really the right person to ask for a letter of recommendation.

Instructions

Part One - Inquiry

Send an inquiry letter via email to the faculty member. Begin the inquiry by introducing yourself. Be sure to mention the relationship between you and this faculty member.

Highlight what it will mean to have a letter from him or her in particular. In other words, why have you chosen this faculty member instead of someone else? Be as detailed as possible.

Faculty members may teach up to 300 students each semester and may have many other obligations; therefore, keep in mind faculty members are very busy people. When asking if the instructor is willing to write a letter, be sure to indicate the date you need to receive it. Try to give 5-6 weeks' notice so the instructor has adequate time to write the letter. This may affect the instructor's decision to write the letter.

To contact a faculty member you may send an email to their faculty email address. Faculty email addresses are formatted as follows: Firstname.Lastname@faculty.ashford.edu. If you are having trouble remembering your faculty member's name, please refer to old coursework or emails. Also, you are welcome to contact your Academic Advisor for additional assistance.

Part Two - Compile Relevant Information

Because faculty members teach so many students during a semester, the faculty member may not remember the details of your classroom experience as well as you do. It is your responsibility to provide the relevant information he or she needs to construct an appropriate and significant letter of recommendation. Not only should you highlight your specific academic experience with the instructor, but also any related academic achievements and extracurricular achievements. The following is a list of items you may want to include to help the instructor prepare the letter of recommendation:

- Your cumulative GPA
- Your GRE scores (if available)
- A list of relevant classes you have taken, including your grades
- A statement of your goals
- Your work and volunteer experience (if any)
- Your accomplishments in research (if any)
- A list of any honors you have received or expect to receive

- Any different programmatic goals for different schools to which you are applying
- An explanation about the area(s) in which you consider yourself challenged or any other information you consider helpful
- The website of the company or school to which you are applying, or phone number if website is not available
- A curriculum vitae describing which classes you took from the faculty member in question, your grades, the topics of any papers you wrote, and any other noteworthy events related to the class in which you participated

Part Three - Thank the Faculty Member

Once you have received the letter, be sure to send the faculty member a thank you letter expressing your appreciation for him or her taking the time to write the recommendation letter for you.

If you are offered the job/internship or granted admission into graduate school, notify the faculty member of the good news.

Part Four - What If Your Request Is Turned Down?

It is important to keep in mind that not every instructor asked to write a letter of recommendation will be able to accommodate the request. Two common reasons for turning down a request to write a letter of recommendation include the following:

- A faculty member may feel he or she does not know you (or your academic abilities) well enough to make a concrete statement of support.
- A faculty member may not feel that you will be successful or have the academic skill set to perform the job or internship functions. This judgment would be based on previous interactions with you so it is important for you to treat every interaction with a faculty or staff member in the most professional manner.