Asking for a Recommendation Letter

Have success in getting the letter you want

Recommendation letters take a lot of time to write well, so give your potential recommender lots of time to decide and write it. Give them a lot of lead time, and present them with all of the information they need, you will hopefully receive a very helpful letter!

A letter should be for something specific (grad school, a specific job, etc.)...do not ask for a general letter. They are not really helpful to anyone. If you want to ask to stay fresh in their minds, etc. Ask to be LINKED with them through Linkedin. Or ask them if they could highlight your progress on ______ project as a recommendation on Linkedin.

Most recommenders get asked by multiple students. So give them time, be gracious and thorough. Make it as easy for them as you can.

1. **Ask at least 5-6 weeks before the date by which the recommendation must be received**

2. Be sure you **ask an appropriate person** (if it is an academic reference, the person should have taught you a 4 credit class at least once. And hopefully – you got a good grade and made a good impression.

3. If they say yes, **get them everything they need** so they can do the letter on time. (your resume, the program description, a copy of your essay - so they can see your passion and interest in the program, any forms, and the information below as well)...If there are paper form, FILL THEM OUT, pre stamp and address the envelopes, etc.

4. You want a letter that has as many specifics about you as possible. This person likely works with dozens of students per term. **Make a cheat sheet for the recommender**: Let them know:
   - **Who the audience is** (what school or job)...what program or job description...give them any forms (make sure you fill them out first), etc.
   - **When it is due** and how it needs to be submitted (email, signed – sealed envelope, online, etc.)

Remind them of:
   - **What class (specifically), term, and year you met (were in their class).** and what grade you got
   - Why you think the relationship you have is special
   - Why you are well qualified and interested in the job/academic program
   - What experience you had that they can comment on specifically (the dialogue you went on, the co-op job you worked to land, the co-op job you just finished, the crises they helped you through.)
   - What your long and short term goals are (professionally, academically)
   - What you want them to highlight about you (it is ok to brag a little and remind them). they might know you well.. but they also know many students well
   - If you have had many conversations with them, summarize a few of the ones that are most relevant to his letter (i.e. “we have spoken many times about my interest in public policy. My project on ______ highlighted _____ and you commented that ________.”. After that project I went on to do _______ because I was so inspired, etc.)

5. **Follow up with a very polite reminder** or two; ask if they need any supplemental information, need you to come pick it up, etc.

6. If they write the letter, **do not forget to thank them and keep them abreast** of all updates on your status (if you got the job, scholarship, etc.)

7. If they give you a copy of the letter, keep it so you have a record and can send it to them if you need to ask for a subsequent letter