

## **How to request a recommendation letter**

*adapted from YMN article, Jan 2006*

First, allow your writers enough time—they may be particularly busy, going out of town, or writing many other letters at that same time. Individuals have different preferences, but two weeks is a good minimum estimate, although you should give more notice if your request is over a break or at a particularly busy time of the year. Keep in mind that a deadline is often a “must be received by” date rather than a postmark, and allow more time accordingly. Adapting previously written letters takes less time, but you should still allow at least a week (not including the time it would take in the mail).

Second, give writers as much information about the letter as you can. This includes any accompanying forms, when the letter is due (clarifying if that date is a “must be received by” date), to whom it should be addressed, and the address where it will be sent. If you would prefer that the letter be put in a sealed-and-signed envelope and returned to you to mail with other materials then indicate that, but you should always give writers the option of sending the letter directly.

Third, include as much information about the scholarship/job/program as you can. A simple source for this might be a copy of the application material or a printout of the web site. Clarify details such as which particular scholarship/job/program you are applying for. Knowing as much specific information as possible can be important for tailoring letters appropriately.

Fourth, include relevant information about yourself, such as a resume, if appropriate, and how to contact you if there are questions. It can be very helpful (and make for a stronger letter) if you can articulate to the writers why you are interested in the opportunity at hand, and what skills and experiences you have that directly apply. Similarly, indicate if there are particular items that do not need to be discussed in depth (perhaps because someone else is writing a letter about that) or if there are items that you would like highlighted: “I have asked the director to write a letter about my participation in the REU last summer, and I was hoping that you could discuss my coursework and tutoring experiences.”

Finally, gather everything together in an organized way, double checking that you have all of the necessary forms. Clear organization is particularly necessary if you have requested several letters (perhaps with slightly different requirements) from one writer. Anything that you can do to make it as easy as possible will pay off.