

Guidelines for seeking Letters of Recommendation:

Effective letters of recommendations that speak to your current skills and your promise for future accomplishments are an important part of job searches or graduate school applications. Referees not only consider your academic performance and work experience but also your professionalism when they write letters for you. Here are some things to consider when requesting letters of recommendation or asking someone to serve as a referee for you.

1. Any faculty with whom you have taken upper level or graduate seminars where you demonstrated your best skills and promise as a student may be approached for a letter of recommendation. Academic advisors or instructors of introductory courses can also write letters for you. However, a letter written on the basis of someone's knowledge of your academic performance in a large class, or on secondary sources (such as your transcript or CV) cannot be as effective as a letter from faculty who has given you high grades in a small seminar, or been an academic mentor.

2. Please ask before listing someone as a reference. It is not enough to say "I am applying for jobs/graduate school, can I list you as a referee?" Give your referees as much information about the kind of internships/jobs you are seeking as you can. This will enable them to speak more specifically about your skills and suitability for a position.

3. Allow the referee a reasonable amount of time to write a letter that reflects your abilities well. A good rule of thumb is to make the preliminary request from a professor about four to six weeks before the letter is due. Do not make last minute or generic requests (or worse *demands!*) for a letter. Some professors will ask you to remind them a week or ten days before the deadline.

4. Provide the referee with the necessary documentation to write you a good letter. For example, copies of your seminar papers may be important evidence to remind a professor about the caliber of your work. Indeed, keep a portfolio of these materials for all your courses. Prof. Asher requires hard copies of the following in order to write a strong letter:

- A brief description of the internship/job/grant/academic program you are applying to (please don't send me a link)
- A draft of your application essay or research proposal
- your current vitae
- an unofficial copy or printout of your transcript

5. Provide any necessary forms (duly filled-out), with addressed envelopes, email contact and deadlines for each letter to be sent. Bring the materials clearly marked with your name all at once rather than piecemeal. If there is more than one application, provide all the applications in one batch.

6. Finally, inform your referees about the outcome of your endeavors. A brief note or an email about the fate of your application is sufficient. If a faculty member agreed to serve as your referee or wrote you a letter of recommendation, it probably means that s/he cares about your professional future. Or they may want to brag about your achievements. Don't feel bad if your endeavors are unsuccessful. Perhaps your referee might have other suggestions for you to follow up on.