

## **GUIDE TO REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

When asking for letters of recommendation for graduate school, employment, internships or fellowships, it's important to remember that anyone who agrees to write a recommendation letter is doing you a favor and has no obligation to write a letter for you.

### **1. Who should I ask?**

Faculty members would provide a more relevant recommendation for graduate school or academic grants, while employers may prefer to receive recommendations from your past supervisors. Professional references, such as faculty and employers, are always preferred over personal references such as family, friends, and clergy.

Select references who know you well and are naturally likely to be enthusiastic when they write or talk about you. You are often judged on the quality of your references, therefore asking leaders in your profession can certainly help establish credibility in your character or work. Your references should understand your professional goals so they can explain why you should be accepted or interviewed and what makes you an excellent candidate.

### **2. How should I ask?**

Schedule an appointment to make your request face-to-face. Using e-mail or telephone should be reserved for out-of-town references or when you have an established relationship with the professor or employer.

Ask if the individual is comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation based on your academic performance, work and skills. If the individual is at all hesitant, consider asking someone else. If the answer is "no," thank the professor or employer for his or her time and accept the response.

Allow references four weeks to prepare your letter. Even more advanced notice might be necessary during the summer months and for major fellowship opportunities.

### **3. What should I prepare for the appointment?**

Based on the letter writer's preferences, be prepared to provide both written and electronic copies of:

- An explanation for why you would like them to be a reference
- An updated copy of your résumé or curriculum vitae
- A list of accomplishments and qualifications that you would like the writer to highlight
- A copy of your personal statement, research interests, unofficial transcript or selection criteria outline
- Deadline dates distinguishing between a "postmark" and a "received by" date
- Addressed and stamped envelopes or specific application website links instead of generalized links
- A list detailing whether each letter should be mailed directly to the graduate admissions office, graduate program, employer, or funding agency for fellowships
- Recommendation forms with your sections completed. Be sure to waive your right to access the letter under the Family Rights and Privacy Act by completing and signing the necessary documents
- A separate list detailing to whom each letter should be addressed (individual or committee, relevant titles, addresses), when requesting multiple letters

### **4. Final steps?**

Always thank your references by sending a note. You will need them again during your career so it is important to establish a solid relationship. Update them on your search as this may encourage them to provide an even better reference next time.