

Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation should directly and specifically support your application for admission to professional or graduate school. The letters should focus upon those areas that directly pertain to your potential to succeed in a graduate program or within a profession. Professional schools typically require letters from faculty only, or faculty and professionals. Academic graduate programs typically require letters from faculty and researchers only. Be sure to check each school or program's requirements to see who the letters should be from, and how many letters you will need to submit. In all cases, however, the letters should be from people who know you well and can write about your academic and/or professional strengths and accomplishments with detail and specificity. Unless specifically required, general character letters are of limited or no value to most admissions committees.

ESTABLISHING FACULTY CONTACT

Establish contact with your instructors early in your college career. A conscientious, deliberate attempt to know and be known by faculty members in your major field of study will bring about greater opportunities for obtaining substantive and specific letters of support for graduate or professional school admission. Letters of recommendation from faculty are more meaningful when based upon their personal knowledge of your abilities and performance as generated through a **mutual interest** or **shared academic or learning activity**. Some admissions committees also welcome letters from faculty in areas outside your major. There are a number of strategies for pursuing faculty contact, such as:

1. **Course Selection** - Consider selecting courses with small class sizes to maximize personal contact with professors and enrolling in subsequent courses offered by the same professor. If qualified, apply for departmental honors or research programs (if available in your major) to establish closer relationships with faculty. Opt for essay exams or extra work whenever possible to draw attention to your writing, research and initiative. And, of course, maintain strong academic performance.
2. **Office Hours** - Faculty keep regular office hours during which time they are available for casual student contact, questions and discussion. Office hours provide students the opportunity to pursue discussion on course topics, to ask for further background material related to course topics or to discuss the major in more detail with a professor. This is also a perfect time to convey to the professor interest in pursuing a graduate degree and to ask which graduate school programs are respected and recognized by others in the field.
3. **Independent Studies** - Independent study is typically initiated by upper division students and is based on a topic of interest to both student and professor. A professor can require topical readings and a laboratory or written project so that the experience qualifies for departmental credit. Such an experience will introduce students to research in their field of interest and provide the opportunity for substantial faculty contact.
4. **Academic Internships/Volunteer Activities** - Students are responsible for finding internships or volunteer experiences related to their major or career goals. These experiences may or may not be well-supervised and guided by faculty. Try to choose those which include faculty participation so that you can maximize your chances for faculty contact and discussion.
5. **Teaching and Research Assistants** - Consider offering to become a teaching or research assistant for professors. Generally students have performed well in courses that they want to "TA." The possibility of becoming a research assistant normally depends upon faculty need for library or laboratory work by assistants, and/or upon available space in laboratories and adequate funding.

ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS

Some professional school programs require or recommend letters of recommendation from professionals in that same field who can attest to the applicant's suitability, preparation and motivation for the profession, and can comment on qualities which relate to the applicant's potential to succeed in professional school.

UCSB can assist students in developing contacts with various professionals through the use of:

1. **Career Services Center** - Come in or visit us online at <http://career.sa.ucsb.edu> to discover the resources we have for you to utilize in your search for ways to connect with health professionals.
2. **Handshake** - is a job and internship database for both on and off campus positions. Students can use this resource to help them find entry level positions or internships that will help them try occupations out or network with others in the field.
3. **Student organization** - Become involved in student organizations that relate to your interests. These organizations provide opportunities to network with individuals in the field and learn about different jobs or industries you may be interested in.
4. **Indeed.com, simplyhired.com, internships.com, other job search websites** - Use these job search websites as well as others to find jobs.

During the position (volunteer, internship, job, etc.) be sure to connect with our supervisors often, develop professional relationships, ask questions, be motivated and proactive- BE AN EXCELLENT EMPLOYEE!

After position is over be sure to stay in touch with supervisors via email or LinkedIn- they like knowing updates! Be sure to send thank you cards to your supervisors after position is over.

CONTENT OF GOOD LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

You want to be certain that your writers are aware of all of your accomplishments so they can discuss the work you did with them in the context of your whole record. Students can help in the construction of their letters by providing certain information to the people who will be writing the letters. Background information like **transcripts, autobiographies, resumes, personal statements** and **research papers** can help faculty members or professionals write thorough and substantive letters. Provide such documentation for your writers whenever possible.

REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION (PROTOCOL)

1. **Request letters of recommendation in person whenever possible. Allow enough time at that meeting to discuss your request, your background and any questions the letter-writer might have.**
2. **Be gracious in your request. Do not expect a letter as your right and also do not negate your right to ask.**
3. **Ask if the potential writer can write a substantive positive letter in support of your application. Never press a prospective referee to submit a letter when he or she appears hesitant to fulfill your request.**
4. **Provide the letter writer with your résumé, personal statement, transcripts, and a letter outlining what you'd like him/her to focus on and what types of programs you are applying for. If you need the letter for multiple programs, include a spreadsheet of program, due date, method of delivery, and any other useful information.**
5. **Allow at least two months between your request and the application deadline.**
6. **Always thank your recommender in writing. A handwritten note is always appreciated.**