

If you're asking for a letter of recommendation . . .

These are good practices to use whenever you ask anyone to serve as a recommender for you, whether you ask at the last minute or well in advance, for a scholarship, grad school, internship, a summer job, or for that job you want so badly it hurts.

When you ask anyone for a letter of recommendation, you are asking for something that takes time and revision. You are likely to be one of perhaps five, maybe as many as 15 or 20, other people for whom that person is writing a letter in that month. So it's your responsibility to make it as easy as possible for the letter-writer to get the material in on time, and to make it as hard as possible to mess up or miss the deadline.

What's makes a letter effective is if it addresses the specific readers of the letter; it makes specific references to their concerns and their organization; and it says some very specific things about you, your work, your goals, your skills, and your personal qualities that are relevant to the thing for which you're applying.

You need to give the letter-writer all the information and words that are needed in order to do that:

- 1) A printout of or link to the award or application directions, from the source (photocopy or URL) with the DEADLINE highlighted clearly.
- 2) If it has to be mailed to another office directly, be sure you HIGHLIGHT the addressee in some neon color. It will usually be mailed in a departmental envelope. If it has to be mailed to you (less and less the case these days), provide the writer with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. If it has to be uploaded, be sure to give the letter-writer clear instructions about who the upload link will come from, if it's not from you.
- 3) If there's more than one place a letter needs to be sent, create a packet of the above for each recipient—especially if there are different due dates.
- 4) Copies of your resume/cv, any personal statement you may have to write for this (even if it's a lousy draft), or a personal statement that you may have written for other purposes in the recent past—something that indicates how you see your preparation and your goals for this particular addressee. If any of this is being sent digitally, be sure the email is also organized, the links work, and the docs are in doc or pdf (not rtf or non-Word) format.

A week before the letter is due, send an email to remind the writer of the due date and to ask if anything else is needed from you.

If you are giving a name to someone as a reference and don't need a letter:

- 1) Send the reference-giver an email with details about the company or program, and a working link to the site that explains the job or program.
- 2) Remind the reference-giver specifically what you want them to speak about regarding you and this position.

Stay in touch with people you want to serve as recommenders for you, and keep them updated on your professional life and development. Tweets and Facebook updates might work, but personal emails—brief ones that don't require an immediate answer—are far superior to either.