



O'NEILL CAREER HUB

How to Ask Faculty for a Letter of Recommendation

What is a letter of recommendation? It is a letter to a potential employer, organization, or program that emphasizes your strengths in relation to the job or program to which you are applying.

What is a professional reference? A professional reference is a professor, supervisor, or colleague who can share insight about your academics, research, former employment or internship, or other experiences.

Your faculty are excited to support your success and are happy to help you by providing letters of recommendation. It is important to make a request that is organized, thoughtful, and respectful of his/her/their time. Follow the process below to make sure your request is professional and appropriate.

2 Months Before Recommendation Is Needed

Create a list of professors who might write a recommendation for you. The most effective recommendations come from people who know you, so ask yourself:

- Is the professor's academic or professional area relevant to the application you are submitting?
- Has this professor seen your recent work?
- Does the professor know you well enough to provide more than generalities about you?
- Have you done well in this professor's courses? Did you participate in class conversations?
- Can this professor comment upon your intellectual development, skills, and goals?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, this professor is a good choice.

5-6 Weeks Before Recommendation is Needed

Ask the professor either in office hours or by email if he/she/they is comfortable writing a letter for you and explain your goals (you plan to apply to graduate school, a scholarship application, or a job).

If you are not currently in the professor's class and send an email:

- Remind him/her/them how you know them and when you met
- Quickly mention projects or papers you completed for him/her/them
- Remind them of anything else that will help them remember you

At Least a Month Before the Recommendation is Needed

If the professor agrees to your request, visit the professor during her/his office hours to discuss your specific plans.

For that meeting, prepare a folder (ask if the professor prefers this information in hardcopy or electronically) for the professor that includes:

- Your resume;
- A description of the program or job you are applying to;
- Copies of work (papers, projects) you have written for this professor with his/her/their comments;
- A statement of purpose/your application essay (this allows the professor to specifically address your audience and to craft the recommendation to fit your needs);
- A list of contact information (to whom is the professor addressing the letter?), addresses, and due dates for various letters;

A word about recommendation forms:

- If you are requesting a paper recommendation, make sure you have filled out the information you must submit and *included envelopes and postage*.
- If you are requesting on-line submissions, make sure that you register the professor with the recommended portfolio/application service.

After Asking for the Recommendation but Before It Is Due

If you have changed your mind about the application and no longer need the recommendation, email the professor immediately. Professors spend weekends, holidays, and late nights writing recommendations. DO NOT waste your professor's time with unnecessary work by failing to let him/her/they know of your change of plans.

One Week Before the Recommendation is Due

You may remind the professor via email. But please only send one reminder.

After the Recommendation is Submitted

THANK YOUR PROFESSOR. THANK YOUR PROFESSOR. THANK YOUR PROFESSOR.

An email thank you is acceptable, but remember you asked him/her/them to make effort for your success. You should put forth the effort to write a thank you letter by hand and mail it to your professor.

Equally important, let the recommender know the outcome of your application. Even if you are not accepted into the program or get the job, letting your professor know and thanking him/her/them again demonstrates your professionalism and maturity.