

HOW TO GET A (GOOD) LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

- 1. DON'T BE SHY.**
Professors expect to write reference letters for good students. They once needed the kind of support you are asking for now! Get to know your professors well before you need to ask for a letter of rec. Visit your faculty advisor and other professors during their office hours; participate in class discussions; make yourself known.
- 2. FOUR WEEK MINIMUM.**
Give your referees as much lead time as possible. Two weeks before the deadline is the absolute minimum - a MONTH is far better! Professors are busy people and they will need the extra time to write you a good letter.
- 3. PRE-PAY POSTAGE.**
The University will not pay postage for letters of recommendation. You must provide pre-addressed, postage-paid mailing envelopes. You can weigh the envelope(s) with any required forms or a few sheets of paper at the Post Office to determine postage in advance.
- 4. AIM FOR PERMANENT FACULTY.**
Many students make a very reasonable mistake — they rely on temporary faculty to provide references to graduate school. Although they may know your work well, temporary faculty may not be around when you need them to write you a letter. Also, letters from permanent faculty usually (but not always) have more influence on grad school selection committees. If you're not sure whether someone is a permanent faculty member, look them up in the Catalogue under their department heading.
- 5. GIVE BACKGROUND INFORMATION.**
Give the faculty member a copy of your work (class papers, etc.) and all necessary forms / documentation. This will help them to write a good, focused letter for you. Generic all-purpose letters go nowhere with graduate school selection committees.
- 6. OFFER SUGGESTIONS.**
Put yourself in your referee's position. She or he has known hundreds of students and may forget some of your accomplishments or personal characteristics. It is entirely appropriate for you to give them a note with something like: "It would be helpful if you would mention my internship with the National Wildlife Foundation in Washington DC."
- 7. FOLLOW UP.**
Remember what most faculty offices look like? Chaos. It's best to check back with each referee to see that the necessary forms and letters have been sent out. Polite reminders a few days before the deadline are greatly appreciated.
- 8. SAY THANKS!**
Keep in touch. Let your referees know you appreciate their help. Tell them what happened, and what your plans are.

-Courtesy of Dept. of Politics & Legal Studies