

Revision based on information provided by the Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Recommendation Letters - Guide for Students

When asking faculty for recommendation letters, keep a few points in mind:

1. Faculty need some time but not too much time. Please seek your letter 3 weeks prior to the deadline. If you know a deadline is coming up but it is several months away (and in a busy time of the semester), give the faculty member a heads up so they will know to expect the request. This will also allow them to complete the letter at their leisure if they prefer (however they also need other information from you so you may still want to wait).
2. Ask if the faculty member can write you a “good” or “strong” letter. It’s not enough to get a letter, it must be an emphatically positive one. If you can’t be assured of such a letter, then you should probably ask another faculty member.
3. Include everything that the faculty member will need to write the letter including all forms, stamped and addressed envelopes (with return addresses from them), your personal statement, your curriculum vitae, and if necessary a brief list of all your activities with the professor. You might also, depending on the scholarship, need to include your scholarship’s research proposal or specific essay.
4. Organize the materials you are submitting very neatly. Eliminate any typos before printing or emailing, and make it clear what goes where and when they are due. You can use color coding of folders and post-its (firmly attached) if that will help keep it all straight. Identify whether materials are to be returned to you, or to the school/the scholarship directly.
5. Don’t bug your letter writers. It’s not necessary to send a reminder every few days, but it’s sometimes a good idea to send an email 1 week before the due date.
6. Send your letter writers to Recommendation Letters-Guide for Faculty ([hyperlink](#)) to if they wish to see more about the kinds of letters we prefer to receive.
7. Send a THANK YOU to your letter writers and follow that up later with the results of the competition. If you think you’re going to be requesting letters from them in the future, BE SURE to stay in touch. Don’t expect that they will want to write you a letter in 4 or 5 years if you never contact them in between.
8. If you have any further questions, just let us know!