



MODULE: REQUESTING A RECOMMENDATION

OVERVIEW

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this module, you will be able to:

- Interpretation: Explain the purpose of a Letter of Recommendation
- Interpretation: Identify best practices for securing a strong Letter of Recommendation
- Application: Select potential references you might approach to seek a Letter of Recommendation

Prior to meeting with mentor

- Select a potential program/ job to which you might want to apply, and draft the email you would use to solicit a Letter of Recommendation from an appropriate reference
- Complete the Five-Minute Reflection

Discussion with mentor

- Communication with other mentors
- Review of Letter of Recommendation solicitation emails
- What specifically is the mentor looking for to make recommendation easier for them?
- Five-Minute Reflection

Checklist

Prior to meeting with advisor

- Review handout with best practices for receiving strong letters of recommendation
- Select a potential program/ job to which you might want to apply, and draft the email you would use to solicit a Letter of Recommendation from an appropriate reference
- Five-minute reflection

Discussion with advisor

- Communication with other mentors
- What specifically is the advisor looking for to make recommendation easier for them



- Five-minute reflection

Mentee Deliverables

- **Deliverable 1: Bring a printed copy of your email, which includes bullet points of your skills and accomplishments, requesting a person to act as your reference to the next meeting.**
- **Deliverable 2: Bring a printed copy of *your* responses in the Sample Reviewer Form to the next meeting.**
- **Deliverable 3: Bring a printed copy of your responses to the Five-Minute Reflection to the next meeting.**

Materials for this Module

- Handout 1 containing a sample Reviewer Form

Module Content Introduction

Letters of recommendation are very common components of an application packet, whether it be for college, internships, co-ops, jobs, fellowships, etc. You may already have experience requesting a letter of recommendation when applying for college. Below you will find best practices for receiving strong letters of recommendation, for opportunities that will help build your professional career. It is important to be fully prepared before asking someone for a letter recommendation.... They are doing a favor for you, and you should make that favor as easy as possible for them to complete. Who you pick to write a letter of recommendation should be tailored to the opportunity you are applying to. Further, if there is a particular discussion point you'd like your recommender to make (to tailor the application), that is something you can also suggest of them. It is ok to revisit the same recommender for various opportunities during your undergraduate career, just always make sure to respect their time.

Tips for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Before you send an email:

- Review the programs, and know to which ones you would like to apply
- Know all the information about the application process, such as:
 - Deadline dates
 - Program requirements and goals
 - How recommendations are sent—recommender may only have access to form once you have submitted your application
- Clarify any confusion by emailing the program point of contact – research the point person's title (Ms., Mrs, Dr. or Mr., Dr.)...if title is not obvious, err on the side of caution and address person as "Dr." Begin email with "Dear Dr. XYZ" (not "hey")
- Read through the entire application



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- Know exactly how many reference letters you need and what type of references they require (e.g. departmental professor, volunteer mentor, etc.)
- You may verbally ask professors for a recommendation, but you should follow up with a formal email
- Professors should be addressed as “Professor XYZ” or “Dr. XYZ”not “Ms. XYZ” or “Mr. XYZ”

Email asking for reference letter:

- Formally and professionally ask your mentor to write recommendation **and to confirm** once the letter has been submitted
- Specify the programs to which you are applying
- Give links to guidelines for the reference writers
- List any deadlines for the writer to be aware
- Ask a minimum of 1 month prior to the actual deadline

Emails with further information about letters (once they have accepted):

- Give links to the reference application, or state that a separate email will be sent to them through the application system
- Provide title and address of person to whom letter should be addressed (need this information even for electronically submitted letters). If letters must be mailed in hardcopy, provide addressed and stamped envelopes.
- Reiterate deadlines, specifically the closest one
- Attach personal statements, resume, bullet points of information, and other pieces of information that can help the reference writer tailor their reference
- Note any specific points that the program wants addressed

Reminder emails:

- Send short email with pertinent information for upcoming application deadlines
- Send reminder ~ 1 week before deadline and another 2-3 days before the deadline. Ask recommender to confirm once they have sent letter.

Final notes:

- Understand recommender’s priorities – most are very busy and are taking extra time to write your recommendation, so be respectful
- Make the process as easy as possible for them
- Continue to check in with the recommender until you have confirmation the letter has been sent. A visit or phone call to their office may be necessary if you have not heard from them by 24 hours of deadline.

Example Recommendation Correspondence

The Initial Email Asking for a Recommendation

Subject: NSF Fellowship & Graduate school reference letters



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Dr. Burg,

I know we briefly talked about reference letters for graduate school applications, but I wanted to formally ask you if you would be kind enough to write me a letter.

I plan on applying for the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship as well, and that letter has a lot more specific guidelines. The deadline for the fellowship letter is **November 14th**.

Graduate school letters will not be due until **December**. I will, of course, provide you with a list of the schools with deadlines and specific information. I should have that by November 1st.

Please let me know if you would like to write my letters. I will do my best to make the process as stress-free as possible for you! Thank you for letting me work in your lab for the past few years - it has been an enriching experience, and I am forever grateful.

Thank you, as always.

Further Information Once They Have Agreed

Subject: NSF Fellowship

Dr. Burg,

Here are the two essays I submitted today for the fellowship. The letter should address specifics from these documents to show that I meet the intellectual merit and broader impact criteria. Erin and I can provide you with specific bullet points if you would like. I found this helpful website that summarizes the two criteria:

[GRFP Letter Tips](#)

Please let me know of anything I can provide to make the process easier for you.

Best,

Finalized Information to Give Definitive Information

Subject: Graduate school letters: List

Dr. Burg,

Thanks again for having my NSF letter in before the deadline! I have finally finished picking schools. **I have attached the list with the deadlines** and more information on specific professors, if you are interested in relating my research interests to how I could be a good fit in their labs.

The first deadline is December 1st (University of Washington). This letter must be submitted along with an evaluation form found [here](#).

You should be receiving the online link to submit the letter by tomorrow. I just called them regarding the page length and format, so I will email you as soon as they get back to me!

Thank you and please let me know if you have any questions.



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Reminder Email at Least 2 Weeks Prior to Deadlines

Subject: Graduate school letters reminder

Dr. Burg,

Hope you are doing well! I just wanted to remind you that the next deadline is **December 15th** for University of Michigan and University of California, San Diego. You should receive emails from them by tomorrow regarding the letter submission.

Thank you for your continuous support! I will remind you a couple of days before the deadline as well. Please confirm submission of letter.

Best,



Assignment(s) for this Module

Assignment(s)

Select an example program, job, or other position for which you might want to apply. Identify someone who could potentially act as a reference for you. You would need to ask them to serve as a reference, typically write a letter of recommendation and complete an evaluation form. You do not need to contact your reference for this exercise but prepare for the future when you will need to request a reference by:

- 1) Drafting the email communication you would use to ask your reference to serve as a reviewer.
 - a. *This is not a blanket invitation, it is for a specific application or opportunity -- you should ask them each time you use their name as a reference.*
 - b. You would attach a copy of your resume
- 2) Creating an outline of bullet points that you think should appear in a Letter of Recommendation. This can be shared with your reference to make it easier for them to draft the letter.

Deliverable 1: Bring a printed copy of your email, which includes bullet points of your skills and accomplishments, requesting a person to act as your reference to the next meeting.

- 3) Put yourself in the place of this reference. Complete the "Sample Reviewer Form" in Handout 1 from their perspective. How do you think an impartial observer will view you and your work?

Deliverable 2: Bring a printed copy of *your* responses in the Sample Reviewer Form to the next meeting.

Five-Minute Reflection

Come up with one question to discuss with your mentor (maybe a concept you are unclear on, something you found interesting, etc.)

What information did you feel was the most informative? Least?

List two people you would be willing to ask for a letter of recommendation and why they would be a good fit.

Deliverable 3: Bring a printed copy of your responses to the Five-Minute Reflection to the next meeting.