

HOW **2** guide: Letters of Recommendation

As part of the graduate school application process, you will likely be required to provide letters of recommendation (sometimes called letters of reference.) These are important to graduate school selection committees as the letters provide an opportunity for people who know you well to describe your skills, personality, and potential for success – something that cannot always be gleaned by grades and scores.

Prospective **employers** are more likely to ask for a list of professional references, as opposed to letters. For developing your professional references document, see the “Professional References” guide.

Some schools want the letters from faculty, while others may want them from professionals in the field. Follow the guidelines for each school.

Letters of Recommendation from Faculty Members

If possible, ask for your reference from the faculty member in person. This way the faculty can put a face with your name. Most faculty members know their students pretty well, but it is best not to make assumptions.

Sample verbiage: *“Dr. Smith, I plan to attend law school in the fall and must provide a letter of recommendation with my application package. Do you feel you know me well enough to provide a reference that will describe my skills and potential for success in law school?”*

If they agree, follow the directions below:

- Send the faculty member an email confirming your discussion. Include in the email:
 - A copy of your personal statement and resume, and tell them which schools and academic programs to which you are applying. (For example: FSU M.S. of Library Science.)
 - It is acceptable to ask (nicely) the faculty member to focus on a particular area. For example, your leadership qualities or your research skills.
 - How the references are to be submitted:
 - Some grad schools require the faculty to log on to a website and submit the reference electronically.
 - Some grad schools require the reference to be mailed directly to the school. In this case, provide the faculty member with a stamped, addressed envelope.
- Send a thank you note to all your references, and let them know which program you decided to attend.

IMPORTANT: Make sure you give faculty members plenty of time to write the reference letter - at the very least four weeks prior to the deadline. And tell them exactly when the deadline date is!

Even if your current plans do not include going to graduate school, it is advisable to obtain the letters from the faculty NOW while their connection to you is strongest...not five years from now when they may not remember you as well. For these letters, let the faculty know that you are undecided about your immediate grad schools plans, so they can write the letter in more general terms. If the letters are in hard copy form, scan them into a PDF document to ensure their safe storage, and keep them on file.

If you are asking current/ former employers for letters of recommendation for either grad school or future employment, follow the same guidelines as described above.