

Asking for a Letter of Recommendation

Before Asking

- Before you begin, check the requirements of the program, internship, scholarship, etc. that you are applying to.
- Be sure you ask people who fulfill those requirements. For example, some programs may ask for letters of recommendation, not from professors you have classes with but rather from mentors or supervisors.
- Once you know the requirements of the application, you will want to identify possible advocates who will speak positively on your behalf and will write your Letter of Recommendation (LOR).
- Create a calendar for when the submission is due, when you will work on the application, and when you will ask for a LOR. Try to give your advocates at least 4 weeks to write their letter, at best 6 weeks.

Asking

- Find a time when you can speak with your possible advocates alone. Respectfully, ask if they will support your upcoming endeavor and help with a LOR. It doesn't have to sound fancy. They know you and most likely will want to support you. You can share why you are asking them.
- If they agree, let them know you'll follow up with an email with all the details. And be sure to say "Thank you".

What's Next

- Within the hour of speaking with the advocate in person, send them an e-mail with all the specifics. Thank them for their time and assistance and provide all necessary details.
- Make sure to provide at least the following:
 - Due date, how to submit the LOR, who will read the letter, etc.
 - A summary of the program and what is your interest in the application
 - Your Resume
 - The body section of your LOR (see other page: Academic Excellence, Research Experience, Leadership, Competencies, and Initiative and Professional Development)

Trust, Verify & Appreciate

You have now provided your advocates with all the information they need to write and submit your LOR. Trust that they will complete the task, but stay alert on your submission.

- If the due date is 1.5 weeks away, and your application does not show their submission, it is best to send a respectful email reminding them of the due date and your appreciation for their help.
- You don't want to be a nag, but if you do not receive a response from your advocate, it is ok to visit them in person to verify; above all, remember to be courteous and appreciative!
- Last but certainly not least, remember to send a thank you note or email and keep them updated on the outcome. Even if you do not receive the scholarship, internship, etc. Other than demonstrating plain courtesy, you may need to ask for their assistance again; it makes it easier to ask for help if you have kept them in the loop rather than beginning with an apology for not letting them know what happened with the previous request.

Writing Your Letter of Recommendation for the Advocate

1. Sometimes, when you ask for a letter, the response you get is, “Sure thing, write me up something, and I’ll take it from there.” So, how do you write a letter of recommendation?
2. Do some small research into the program or scholarship being sought. Are there additional topics that need to be addressed beyond the normal template below?
3. Pick specific descriptors and back them up with evidence. Why are you hard-working or passionate? Provide specific details instead of fluff. Don’t repeat your resume.
4. Check your work! Re-read the letter. Is the correct program, internship, etc. mentioned?

Template for writing a Letter of Recommendation

To Whom It May Concern:

Introduction

The first line should have your full name and for what program, internship, etc. You are writing the letter for your advocate, so state how long they have known you and in what context. Share what degree and university you are attending. Provide 1-2 sentences on interest of study.

Example) I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation for Angel in support of his application for the NSF Scholars Internship Program. As one of Angel’s mentors, I am well able to speak to his character, capacity, and competency. Angel is pursuing a Biomedical Engineering degree at the...

Body

Under each topic after the colon, try to write 5-6 sentences that speak to the topic.

Academic Excellence: What is your GPA? Are there courses that stand out? Did you receive scholarships or academic awards? This is where you write about your academic strengths. If there are weaknesses, how did you overcome them, and how are these traits applicable to the opportunity you seek with this program, internship, etc?

Research, Internship, Teaching Experience: Have you completed any internships, research, etc.? How does this showcase your strengths and abilities?

Leadership and Project Management: Highlight where you have demonstrated leadership skills or served as a project manager. Share what skills you used as a leader and show the positive outcome.

Competencies and Technical Proficiency: What areas are you proficient in? Do you speak multiple languages, are you good at computer programming, etc.? Do you have any certifications?

Initiative and Professional Development: Are you part of any organization? Have you or are you seeking out opportunities? What do you do for professional development? Take professional workshops, internship panels, resume building, career fairs, etc.

Conclusion

Give the recommendation and reiterate what you will contribute to the program/internship if selected.

Example) It is without hesitation that I recommend Angel for the NSF Scholars Internship Program. As a scholarship recipient, through his leadership skills and teamwork approach, he will represent the NSF program in a positive light. I have no doubt that Angel will succeed in all his endeavors and would serve as a good role model for future NSF program recipients.