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How to Ask For a letter of Recommendation

When it is time for you to get letters of recommendation, whether for college admission or a job application; you must ensure putting considerable efforts into the process. It is not a good idea to simply ask any random person to give you a letter of recommendation; you must choose the writers of these letters wisely. You also need to plan your timing and approach well in order to get a positive response.

Ask someone you know well

Students and employees often make the mistake of approaching any instructor/supervisor for a letter of recommendation. It is necessary that the instructor or employer knows you and your work well so that they can provide a genuine and dependable letter.

In case of a job recommendation letter, it is okay to approach people other than your immediate employer; these include business acquaintances, customers and vendors, provided you are sure that they will offer strong referrals. Likewise, in case of student letters of recommendation, it is advisable to go in for academicians who are guaranteed of giving you a strong recommendation rather than a lukewarm response.

Ask early

In case of student recommendation letters, one should not wait until the end of the semester to get them from one's professors. Most instructors are already flooded with such requests at this time of the year; so your letter may suffer due to this. When you approach your professor way before the deadlines, you are easing the pressure on them and also giving them adequate time to think about your achievements.

Many busy professors and employers tend to keep the letters with them for a while. When you leave wider time margins; you can send them gentle reminders about any impending deadlines.

Ask personally & Provide your Details

When asking for a letter of recommendation, it is essential that you ask personally rather than leaving voicemails or sending emails. This conveys the importance you are attaching to the letter.

Most supervisors and college instructors are flooded with hundreds of such requests; they are not going to remember your achievements despite your stellar performance. Hence you must send some materials along with the letter of recommendation request forms to remind the writer about your past accomplishments. You may also include your resume and relevant material that earned you the recognition/higher grade in the first place. Furthermore, you must clearly state your plans and goals so that the writer is aware of the course/job position you are applying for and highlight relevant qualities for the same in the letter.

Provide the right materials



Often students are required to send out multiple letters of recommendations to various schools. In such a case, one must provide the writer with adequate number of stamped envelopes. You must also organize the forms well in separate folders if needed and include a cover page with a list of schools you are applying to. The envelopes must be of right sizes, and you must also overestimate the postage.

Some employees/students are known to provide writers with diskettes/memory sticks to help maintain a soft copy of these letters. This greatly reduces the hassles that can occur in the event the letters are lost in the mail.

Ensure confidentiality

Letters of recommendation that are confidential and unopened carry more weight than accessed ones. The law states that you have a right to read your letters of recommendations but, where possible, you must waive these rights. This assures the reader that the letters of recommendation are candid and honest. Writers are also known to be more comfortable in writing letters when they know that the applicant will not have access to them. Hence, it is best to not approach employers/professors whom you feel might give you negative feedback in the letter.

Thank the writer

Once the writer has sent out the letters of recommendation make sure you send him a thank you note.

Letters of recommendations, whether for a job or college admission, are an indispensable part of the application process and a vital element in one's career. Hope the above tips help you secure a stellar letter of recommendation.

Image Courtesy of Nutdanai Apikhomboonwaroot/adamr/ David Castillo Dominici/ Stuart miles/ photostock/ Freedigitalphotos.net.