

# How to Ask for Strong Letters of Recommendation

## HOW TO GET A STRONG LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION



Before you ask someone to write you a letter of recommendation, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) **How long has this person known me and in what capacity?**
- 2) **How “well” does this person know me?**
  - a. Do I speak up and ask questions in class?
  - b. Have I visited office hours?
  - c. Have I discussed my graduate school goals with this person? Can they describe my research interests and career goals?
  - d. Can this person describe my intellectual ability (e.g., oral communication, written communication)?
  - e. Can this person say more than “This person attended my class and earned an X grade”?

**If you said NO to any of the above questions, consider if this is the best person to write you a STRONG letter.**

## What Letter Writers Need from You

If you feel that the person can say more than what you earned in his/her class, you still need to compile and submit the following documents so that your reference can write you a strong compelling letter:

### REQUIRED DOCUMENTS:

- 1) **List of all schools + due dates** (ordered chronologically)
  - a. Most schools now require online submissions, but be sure your letter writer has any PDF forms that must also be completed with submission.
- 2) **Unofficial Transcript** – must include current GPA
- 3) **Curriculum Vitae (CV)** – Your CV is like an “academic resume.” It includes relevant coursework taken, work experience, research experience, volunteer experience, and relevant skills.
- 4) **Statement of Purpose** – You should always include at least a draft of the statement you plan to submit with your application. This statement outlines why you are applying and why you are a good candidate.

### OPTIONAL DOCUMENTS:

- 5) **Personal Statement (OPTIONAL)** – Describes any challenges/obstacles you’ve overcome; why you’ve selected the path you’ve chosen.
- 6) **Papers or presentations (OPTIONAL)** – include writing samples or presentations from courses you’ve taken with the letter writer (this allows your letter writer to speak to your oral/written communication skills).

**Do not wait until the last minute to get your materials together!  
Letter writers need a MINIMUM of TWO weeks before the due date. Give them more!**