



# CAREER VISION

## *Letters of Recommendation for College Applications: Who Will Sing Your Praises?*

It's almost as if we can hear what's going through your head right now. You're thinking that requesting a letter of recommendation has to be the simplest part of the college application process, right? After all, you've done most of the hard work already — choosing the colleges you'll apply to! Now, here comes the easy part: *ask a few people to compose a letter singing your praises.*

Well, truth be told, it's not always that simple. While letters of recommendation are just one part of your application, they do play an important role in the college admissions process. These letters provide admission representatives with valuable information that's not necessarily obvious from your college application alone. Letters of recommendation stand as a testament to your unique qualities, character, tenacity, academic successes, and personal achievements.

Here are some important tips to ensure that your letters of recommendation show you in the best light.

### **Orchestrate the Process**

In order to get the best recommendations letters, you've got to take the lead. Start by getting organized — *and the earlier, the better.* For each school you're applying, to **find out about the college's policies regarding letters of recommendations.** Policies vary from school to school, so read each college application very carefully.

- ✓ Find out how many letters are needed. Many colleges require at least one recommendation letter; others ask for as many as three.
- ✓ Check whether there are specific requirements as to who should write the letters. Almost all colleges requiring recommendation letters expect a counselor recommendation. Many ask for a recommendation from a teacher (sometimes for specific academic subject, such as an English).
- ✓ Gather the forms each college requires.
- ✓ Record application deadlines on a calendar so that you know which ones take precedence.



# CAREER VISION

In addition, be sure to **check whether your high school has a specific policy** regarding letters of recommendation. If so, be sure to follow it *exactly*.

There are different ways that letters of recommendation can be submitted to colleges. Some high schools require their own form, which is mailed to the colleges. On the other hand, most high schools require that recommendations be submitted electronically. For example, online submission is available for both [The Common Application](#) and [Naviance](#). It's important to note, however, that *you* don't actually have to submit your recommendation letters. Your teachers and counselor will do that. However, it's your responsibility to request the recommendation and orchestrate the process.

(For more information: [How Do Recommenders Submit Their Letters Online?](#))

## What's in Your Repertoire?

Work hard in school. Show your teachers your commitment to academic success and your unwavering determination so that they can attest to those qualities in your letter of recommendation. Think about what you've accomplished. What do you want your recommenders to know about you? Supply them with the appropriate information in order to get the best letters of recommendation. Make the process easy for your recommenders by putting together a packet that includes:

- ✓ **A cover letter** that formally asks for a letter of recommendation, the name of the college you're applying to, application deadline, and any other application requirements your recommender needs to know about.

When requesting a recommendation from your counselor, it can be helpful to include an explanation of why you're interested in the school, your expected major (if known), what you plan to do after college, and how the degree you'll earn will help you achieve your career goals. Also, if you need to address a low grade on your transcript, explain why you had difficulty in the class and how you've turned it around since then.

When requesting a recommendation letter from teachers, remind them of class projects you're most proud of and examples of your good work. If applicable, describe any challenges you overcame in the class as well.



# CAREER VISION

- ✓ **The recommendation form** included in the college's application packet.
- ✓ **Stamped envelope** addressed to the college (if the letter of recommendation will be mailed to the college rather than submitted electronically).
- ✓ **An unofficial transcript** showing your grades.
- ✓ **A copy of your application essay.** Your essay provides your recommenders with deeper insight into who you are and how you see yourself.
- ✓ (optional) **A resume** highlighting your accomplishments.

## Select the Best Ensemble

Now it's time to decide whom you'll ask to write letters of recommendation. Choose wisely. Find people who know you well and interact with you often. Your recommenders need to be able to describe you and your academic potential with enough detail to make a lasting impression on admissions officers. Be sure that the people you ask are good writers who can compose well-written communications. Most importantly, select people who think highly of you.

Even if not a requirement for the college application, most high school students ask their counselor for a letter of recommendation. Not only do they typically have the most experience with writing recommendations, they also understand what colleges look for in these letters.

Think about your teachers. Which ones know you best? Who would be enthusiastic about writing a recommendation letter for you? Ideally, these letters should be written by teachers you had in junior or senior year for academic subject areas (English, math, science, social studies, foreign language). If you plan to major in the visual or performing arts, ask a teacher in that discipline. Keep in mind that the best recommendations don't always come from the teacher who gave you an "A", but rather from one who watched your academic performance improve dramatically throughout the term.

You can also ask coaches, club sponsors, employers and advisors for a letter of recommendation. Admissions representatives often appreciate the perspective these individuals offer. For example, coaches and employers can speak to some of your qualities that may not be demonstrated in a classroom environment.



# CAREER VISION

## **Conduct Yourself Appropriately**

When you approach someone for a recommendation, remember to be polite and tactful. Give your recommender plenty of lead time — *at least four weeks*.

If you're applying to a college under an early decision or early action plan, you'll need to make your request at the beginning of senior year, if not before! (*For more information: [The Facts About Applying Early: Is It Right for You?](#)*)

If she agrees to write the letter on your behalf, give your recommender the packet of information you prepared. (*Note: if you sense any hesitation regarding your request for a recommendation letter, consider asking someone else. After all, you want each letter to come from a person who sings your praises with sincere gusto.*)

Finally, follow up with your colleges to confirm that the letters have been received.

## **End on a High Note**

Show your gratitude to those who have written a letter of recommendation on your behalf. Write a thank you note or drop off a small token of appreciation to acknowledge all they have done for you.