

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Throughout your Brandeis career and beyond, you are likely to apply for programs, internships, or fellowships that require one or more written letters of reference from faculty members, administrators or other professionals. This information sheet has been created to assist you in the process of requesting such letters.

Key considerations to take into account when requesting a letter of reference:

Quality of the relationship. In an ideal world, the people you will ask to write letters on your behalf are those whom you have gotten to know well. Active participation in class is perhaps the best way to get to know a professor. It is also a good idea to take advantage of open faculty office hours and departmental meetings as a way to establish additional personal and academic connections with professors early in your studies. Don't discount relationships with graduate teaching assistants. If you feel the graduate TA for a course knows you well and the professor only slightly, consider asking them to write a joint letter. Consider using one of your meal-plan guest meals to invite a professor to lunch. This type of initiative is an excellent way to keep in touch with faculty whom you may not have seen in a while.

Time. No matter how well a professor knows you, if you ask for a reference at the last minute, you are in danger of jeopardizing the quality of your recommendation or a professor's ability to write on your behalf at all. It is wise to allow a professor at least one month to prepare a letter of reference.

Preparation. Before requesting a reference, it is a good idea to prepare the following information:

1. A copy of a CV or resume highlighting your accomplishments. The Hiatt Career Center is an excellent resource for learning how to prepare such a document.
2. A copy of your transcript or an informal record printed from *sage* indicating courses you have taken with the particular professor and/or in your concentration, if applicable.
3. Copies of exams or papers you have written for this instructor, including your grades and the comments.
4. A description of the program or fellowship to which you are applying.
5. A copy of any personal statements you will be submitting along with your application.
6. The program or institution's reference form, filled out appropriately. Many faculty members will choose to write their reference on formal letterhead instead of filling out an individual form. Ask your references if they would like a stamped, addressed envelop to mail directly or if they prefer to return the letter in a signed, sealed envelop for you to send.

Confidentiality. Consider carefully whether you will choose to *waive* your right to read the recommendation and sign your form at the appropriate place. Whereas admissions committees recognize and respect that you have the legal right not to waive access to your recommendation, some schools or agencies may consider confidential letters more useful.

Making the Request. Although most professors are happy to be of help, please keep in mind that no one is required to write a letter of reference and circumstances may dictate that a professor is unable to accommodate your request. It is thus a good idea to set up an appointment with a professor well in advance to discuss your goals and to make the request. Do not simply drop off a reference form in a professor's box or send her or him a casual email. If special circumstances mean that you are forced to ask for a reference on short notice, be sure to ascertain that the professor is willing to meet your tight deadline.

Confirm receipt. You should always check with your school or program that your application is complete and that your references have arrived.

Notification. Make sure to notify your reference writers of your final decisions. Professors generally like to hear about your acceptances and can help provide useful perspective in the event you were not successful.