

Tips for asking for a Letter of Recommendation

Decide whom to ask. It goes without saying that asking that biology professor who would always call you out for sleeping in class for a letter of recommendation is probably not the best idea.

If you're nervous that the letter-writer won't write you a good letter of recommendation, then ask someone else.

If the professor you asked refuses to write you a letter of recommendation, do not get angry or upset. Politely thank him or her for their time and move on to someone else.

Ask early. Believe it or not, professors have a life outside the classroom or lecture hall. Often, this life is a busy one. The earlier you ask for your letter, the better. That way, your professor will not feel rushed and will therefore be less inclined to decline your request. It also goes without saying that this will ensure that you get your letter in time.

Approach the professor in person. Never ask your professor right before or right after class, when everyone is rushing in and out of the classroom or lecture hall. Go to your professor's office hours or set up an appointment to explain your situation and ask for a letter. If this is not an option, at least send your professor a formal, polite e-mail explaining why you cannot request a letter in person.

Tell your professor a little more about you. Most likely, your professor only has a sense of who you are through your class participation and grades. It is never a bad idea to tell your professor about what you do and what interests you. This will help him or her write an even more personal and genuine letter.

Also include specific information about the country you are going to and program. Please also be sure the letter writer knows that the letter should be written on official UC or company letterhead.

Remind your professor. Do not forget – professors are busy. Some can even be a little absentminded. If two or three weeks have gone by without you receiving (or them sending) the letter, then politely remind them of your situation. Chances are, he or she will write the letter almost immediately after that.

Send a thank-you note – not an e-mail. In addition to thanking your professor in person (which is common courtesy), make sure to send him or her a handwritten thank-you note as well. Not only is this more personal than an email, but it shows your professor that you are genuinely thankful. And after that, he or she will probably want to write you a letter of recommendation in the future.