

Letters of Recommendation

Most graduate school applications require several letters of recommendation. Students should ask for letters from professional people who know them well, such as faculty and supervisors for psychology-related work. The people who agree to write letters of recommendation are also known as references and can be listed on students' curriculum vitae (CV). Letters of recommendation should speak to students ability to perform well in graduate school. If there are specific qualities that students want to have highlighted, be sure to ask individual references to include these qualities in their letter. Students should provide their references with information about students' academic achievements (e.g., GPA), their CV, the specific graduate programs students are applying to, future goals, due dates for the applications, and students' contact information.

Other issues to consider in letters of recommendation

1. Students should consider how much contact they have had with the individual before they choose their references. If faculty know little about students who ask for recommendations, faculty will have little to say about these students. This is why out-of-class experiences with faculty are so important; they give the faculty a chance to know students well enough to write good letters of recommendation. Also, students should think about what kinds of academic behaviors, (i.e., computer skills, research and teaching skills, problem-solving skills, etc.) the faculty member has seen them perform and what evidence faculty have of students' reliability, initiative, and creativity. These qualities are typical items that individuals include in letters of recommendation.

Students should ask the individual if they can write a good recommendation. If students do not ask, they may be surprised later if the recommendation provides very little detail about students' qualities or if the recommendation was not as positive as desired.

2. Check the instructions in the graduate school application materials to see if letters should be mailed directly to the school from students references or if students need to include the letters in their application packet. Some graduate school require letters of recommendation be sent in sealed envelopes with signatures across the flap. Students should provide their references with addressed, stamped envelopes for their letters if the letters should be mailed separately from the application. If there is a recommendation form from the graduate school, students should TYPE all of their information before giving the forms to the individuals writing the letters. Be sure to type the individual's name and title correctly.

Recommendation forms usually include a confidentiality waiver. Students should sign the confidentiality waiver giving up their right to review the recommendations. Non-confidential recommendations are generally given less consideration than confidential recommendations, and most individuals are generally not willing to write a recommendation which is weakened by non-confidential status.

3. Give the individual plenty of notice of a request for a letter of recommendation. A month before graduate school applications are due is a reasonable amount of time. Once an individual has written one letter of recommendation for a student, it will be easier to produce additional

letters at shorter intervals if the student needs more recommendations for different graduate programs.

4. Students should inform those individuals who wrote letters of recommendation of students' success in being admitted to graduate programs or receiving scholarships, awards, etc.