

Project Access USA

Letters of Recommendation

When you are applying to colleges in the US, you are often required to have at least 1-2 letters of recommendation from references, or individuals who know you well and can speak to your character and ability to excel in college. References are a great way for admissions departments to get to know you better and gain insight into your skills and accomplishments.

Who should I ask for a letter of recommendation?

The best person to ask for a reference is an individual who knows you very well and can speak to your character. They should be a strong writer, so often Coaches, extracurricular directors, and teachers with whom you have a good working relationship with can often be the best choice for a letter of recommendation. For instance, if you played a sport for four years, or if you were really involved in a theatre or a community service organization, if you loved biology and really excelled. If you spent a lot of time working at a part-time job, it could be a great idea to ask your manager or supervisor. It can also be helpful to gain a letter of recommendation from someone who can speak to a part of you that you have not had the chance to talk about in your application.

Certain colleges have requirements about the individuals the recommendations must come from, so be sure to check those out early! Diversity in recommenders (e.g. asking for a letter of recommendation from a soccer coach and a teacher) can be very helpful, helping to highlight both your academic and personal qualities. Make sure your recommenders are also individuals with whom you've gotten to know recently (the past two years of high school are ideal). Having them highlight specific examples (such as a time you helped organize a community-wide event or created an innovative engineering project) can be helpful.

It may be tempting to ask for a reference from famous alumni, government worker, or celebrity in order to help your application stand out, but you typically should only reach out for one if you know them very well. It's better to have someone who can truly speak to your character and qualities as an intelligent, caring person.

How should I ask for a letter of recommendation?

In order to allow your recommender to have plenty of time to construct a great letter of recommendation for you, be sure to ask them as far in advance as possible! A good rule is 4-6 weeks in advance, although you can ask even up to the semester before in order to give enough advance warning, as teachers and coaches often have to write dozens of letters of recommendation.

Make sure to give your recommender your application deadlines and check in well in advance (although not too much to be bothersome) to ensure that they are able to write your letter of recommendation. If there is only a small amount of time remaining (1-2 weeks), and it doesn't seem like your recommender will be done in time, don't worry! Consider asking your recommender if it would be helpful to them to have another person write your recommendation and have a backup recommender or two in mind just in case.

Help provide them with details about your journey growing up (including any personal challenges you may have faced), academic history, and desire for applying to a specific school. It is helpful to ask in person, and to follow up with a hand-written thank you note afterwards to show your appreciation for their time. [Here](#) are some examples of letters of recommendation, more of which can be found online!

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