

Instructions in Requesting Letters of Recommendation Human Development Department

We are blessed with having a successful major that keeps growing. However, the blessing can be challenging for the few faculty we have in the department. Therefore, to cope with the demand for recommendations, the department is now asking that you follow these instructions when requesting a letter of recommendation.

Because time is often in short supply, we are asking that you provide your recommender with a *draft letter* of recommendation, which we can use to form our letter and to inform us on what you expect us to say. While we are not bound to use the letter, it will help to bring forth your expectations regarding your accomplishments and sense of fit with the program or job you are applying to. Send it to us in electronic form.

This is a recommended process for students to follow. Individual faculty members are free to do things differently if they so choose. At this point in time, the majority of the faculty members in Human Development have chosen to follow these guidelines. Talk to individual faculty members to get any further guidelines.

Provide Us With Basic Info on Yourself. Remind us or tell us who you are: "I'm the red-headed student who took your class in the Spring of '09 who met with you to discuss suicide prevention research". "I wrote a paper on King Kong's early development and trauma leading to his aggression. Remember?!". Include your overall GPA, GPA for the major and GPA for the last two years at CSUSM. The more information you give us to juggle our memory the better. Give us your complete name and contact information (especially email and phone number) along with information of the place(s) you are applying to. Remind us about you by noting anything special that makes us remember you or your work (e.g.). Let us know the classes you took from us, the terms when you took them and the grades you received.

Provide Draft of Statement of Purpose Educational and Career Objectives. Provide a copy or draft of your statement of purpose. Make sure and make it convincing to the reader that your choice of program is logical and well thought out. Through it, demonstrate that you know about the program you are applying to. Competitive statements are tailored to each program of interest and are not general: "I am interested in getting into any graduate program that let's me in." In the letter, make sure you indicate in it why you stand out from other applicants.

Provide Info on the Program. Make sure and provide us with the name and information about the program you are applying to, include a link to their website where the program is described. Also, provide us with the URL for the program so if we wish to read up more on the program we can do that. Also, provide us with the URL tied to submitting letters of recommendation if letters and forms are to be completed online.

Mailing Packet for Us to Use and Delivery Instructions. You need to provide us with a hard copy of the forms and do not ask us to print them out or any other information that is important. Fill in the pertinent information on the forms too, like your name and everything that you as an applicant need to have filled out. Do not give us blank forms. Make sure and include the recommender form that usually goes with the letter of recommendation. Please know that most universities provide a form for the recommender. Many of us answer the questions that are on the form within a letter, which we attach to the form. So make sure and give us the recommender form.

Make sure and include stamped and addressed envelopes with specific instructions on whether the envelopes need to have our signature on the envelope's seal, as many programs require. Any special instructions for us must be clear and simple (e.g., "When done, please tape the letter with my name on your office door so I can pick up." Or "Please mail the letter to my home using the addressed and stamped envelope.").

Confidentiality Waivers. You need to decide on whether recommendation forms and letters are to be confidential or not—that is, accessible to you or not. When you check off the “waive your right” choice you are saying that the letter of recommendation and form will not be accessible to you by your own choice. Presumably this gives your recommenders full freedom to say what they want about you and theoretically it may be perceived as being more truthful than those written with knowledge that the student may read them. It is recommended that you choose to make the information by your professor confidential (i.e., that you waive your right), but make sure you know that the professor is willing to write you a favorable letter of recommendation. Be direct and ask professors on how favorable and strong a letter of recommendation is likely to be. We will be honest with you and tell you if we would be strong recommenders or if we prefer that you use someone else.

Job Recommendations and References. In regards to recommendations for potential employers, we would like for you to provide the faculty member with written authorization letting him/her know that they can talk to the designated organizations or persons you choose. Make sure and let us know ahead of time when you are using us as references. At the same time, make sure and tell us in writing that you are authorizing us to talk to the designated organizations. It is up to faculty to accept emails in lieu of letters from you to us giving us that authorization. Check with the faculty member in question.

Deadlines. Be clear on the timelines you have. Give us the due dates for letters and forms. Try to give professors at least three weeks to prepare a letter. By all means, keep giving us reminders: “Just wanted to remind you that recommendation letters are due by November 1”. Any more these days, universities are having recommenders go to a university website. These are great, but know that sometimes without reminders, these online requests are even more at risk of being forgotten without reminders that include the link to respond.

RECOMMENDED

Share with Us Your Resume. Having a copy of your current resume gives us a broader view of your work history and achievements, which perhaps we use and refer to in our letter of recommendation.

A Personal Visit ~ Highly Suggested. If possible, come by and make your request in person during office hours or through an appointment because there is nothing like putting a name with a face. “Oh yeah, now I remember you!!!” This way we can become reacquainted with you and this can juggle our memory about you and thereby make the letter and form more personal in nature. More importantly, we can get the latest info from you on why you want to pursue particular job or graduate program(s). It can also help us understand the fit between you and the programs or jobs you are applying to.

Here are some web-links that can help you write a good draft of your letter of recommendation:

- [Outline for a good letter of recommendation](#)
- [Sample Letter:](#)

Other Helpful Resources

Writing a good statement of purpose is key to entering competitive graduate programs. For help in knowing how to write effective statements of purpose, visit the following web link:

<https://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm>