Requests for Letters of Recommendation
Psychology Department, West Chester University of PA

As faculty in the psychology department, we often get requests from students to write letters of recommendation. Before you request letters from psychology faculty, please review the information below first and follow the guidelines specified later. This information and the guidelines are intended to ensure that good letters of recommendation are submitted in a timely fashion.

First, important things to be aware of…

A good letter is important as a potential gateway to graduate schools, fellowships, and jobs. However, good letters are built on: (1) the foundation that students create for themselves (e.g., strong work ethic, talent, and motivation); and (2) the relationship that students have with the letter writer. It is critical to cultivate relationships with individuals who can advocate for you or know you well enough to convey a strong sense of who you are. If you have not done so, you need to do the work to foster those relationships. Building such relationships takes time—start early in your college career (e.g., by volunteering to do research in a professor's lab in your sophomore, or even freshman, year; by working with a student organization such as Psych Club or Student Life Committee).

Second, who should be asking faculty for a letter?

The most effective letters offer details about YOU and who you are as a student, researcher, etc. Therefore, you want a letter from a professor who knows you well. You may get to know faculty through a variety of ways. In short, good letters are valuable, but letters that are less strong, weak, or negative will only hinder your application. Therefore, it is important that you reflect on your experiences and performance in our classes and research labs before you ask for letters of recommendation. When you ask a professor for a letter, it is acceptable (and in fact, likely preferred) that you ask, "Would it be possible for you to write me a strong letter of recommendation?"

Third, what materials and pertinent information do you need to provide to faculty who have agreed to write you a letter of recommendation? What else do you need to do?

All materials and information need to be provided to your letter writer 4-5 weeks before the first deadline.

Please provide all the following materials and information:
- A description of what you did in our classes or research lab that we might talk about in a letter for you. That is, if there are particular assignments, projects, or activities that you would like us to emphasize, let us know. A brief summary should suffice.
- Resume or curriculum vita (include all relevant entrance exam scores from the GRE, MCAT, etc.)
- Statement of purpose or essay that you are submitting to the program/school or the job description
- Be clear in your instructions for your application (submit your instructions to us by email, preferably in a word document). Include a list of deadlines (specify postmark or receipt date), the name of the specific program, fellowship, or job, and mailing information (also specify to whom the letter should be addressed), and the type of submission (by email, online, regular post). If you are applying to doctoral programs, include a list of the professors who you are interested in working with along with a description of the program. In short, you need to provide us with all relevant forms, accompanying instructions, and stamped envelopes addressed to the program/fellowship/job for letters submitted via postal mail.

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Students often find it most helpful to stay organized using an Excel worksheet. Each row can be one program you are applying to, and then there can be columns with instructions, how to submit, who to submit to, deadline, etc. You can then just send that worksheet to each professor in advance of the first deadline. If you date it in the file name, you can send updated versions later without creating confusion (e.g., SamSmith_GradAppInfo_10-12-15. This might be followed by a later file named SamSmith_GradAppInfo_12-1-15).

For all recommendation forms (online and paper versions), the name, affiliation, and contact information of your letter writer needs to be completed by you before you pass on the forms to the letter writer.

Our contact information is listed on the psychology department website (click on Faculty). You may use the following template:

Name: [insert name of faculty], Ph.D.
Title: [insert Assistant/Associate/Full] Professor
Address: Department of Psychology
West Chester University of PA
West Chester, PA 19383-2145
phone: [insert phone number]
email: [insert email address]

Professors will most likely submit your letters on time (though, perhaps "just" on time). Still, it is acceptable (and sometimes preferred) to send a polite reminder no more than a week before the due date if you know the letter has not yet been submitted.

Websites offering information specifically about requesting letters of recommendation:
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/970/01
http://www.accepted.com/grad/letters_rec_request.aspx
http://gradschool.about.com/od/askingforletters/a/askletter.htm
http://web.csulb.edu/~psy301/lettersrec.html
http://psych.hanover.edu/handbook/rec_letters2.html
http://www.universityaffairs.ca/career-advice/career-advice-article/how-to-ask-for-a-reference-letter/

Websites offering information about applying to grad school more generally:
http://www.apa.org/education/grad/applying.aspx
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/dept/resources/getin3.html