

Here are some general requests and suggestions that I offer for students (and former students) requesting a letter of recommendation (for jobs, internships, study abroad programs, etc., but *especially* for competitive graduate or professional schools):

First, you should know that virtually all letters of recommendation are positive. In most cases, if someone feels unable to write a positive letter on your behalf, they won't -- and shouldn't -- agree to write one at all. That's good and bad. It means that you shouldn't worry too much about 'bad' letters. *But* it also means that a brief, general letter is typically of little value.

What admissions and hiring committees look for, then, is an indication that the person writing the letter knows you reasonably well, understands the requirements of the sort of program you are applying for, and can offer specific, substantive reasons why they should admit or hire you.

For me – or anyone else – to write this sort of letter requires your help. The more information that you can provide me (within reason!) the more specific a letter I am able to write on your behalf. Below are examples of the sort of information that I find helpful; the most important stuff is at the top. Not everyone needs to provide all of this and some might not be appropriate in your case. But the more you provide, the more likely that I can write a letter that will help you achieve your goals:

- Brief summary of your experience in my courses (reminders of which semesters you were enrolled can help too) or other ways I know you. If there are any papers or projects that you are especially proud of, or any that are especially relevant to the programs you are applying for, be sure to highlight this.
- Description of why you are applying for this sort of program. (This may also be contained in the next item...)
- Your statement of purpose/application essay/cover letter (this can be a draft).
- College transcripts, resume, or other relevant documents can be useful.
- Other information that it'd be helpful to know about you in relation to your application.

Once you give this information to me, along with any relevant forms, I expect at least a couple weeks to write your letter. If you need it more quickly, I'll try to accommodate you if I can.

I also *strongly* encourage you to email me again a few days prior to the date that applications must be sent to confirm that I have done so.

Finally: keep me informed!!! Let me know whether you get admitted or hired! Let me know how it's going if you do!