



Who?

- Ask professors who will be able to speak to your academic abilities and personal characteristics positively.
- What does this professor know about you? It is important to consider the quality of the reference they would be able to provide.

What?

- Make sure you provide information beyond simply, “Will you write a letter of reference for me?” Let them know the school, program, and due date for their reference letter.
- Include your CV so that they can refer to your achievements and extra-curricular commitments.
- Ensure your reference understands your career goals and why you are applying to the program. Share this verbally or include a draft of your statement of intent.
- Be mindful of your tone. Even if you know the professor on an informal level, be professional and respectful of their time in all communication.

When?

- Allow a minimum of four weeks for professors to write a letter of reference. Ask early! Some professors have a cut-off date for reference requests as they only have the capacity to write so many.
- If you are taking a year off before applying, give them notice before you leave campus that you will be asking them for a reference. They might write a draft now while you are still fresh in their mind.

How?

- Whenever possible, ask in person. Visit their office hours or set up a meeting.
- If emailing, put “Letter of Reference for [Your First & Last Name]” as the subject line.
- Provide a “cheat sheet” of your accomplishments; a summary of your strengths and specific examples when you have used them.

Additional Tips:

- Follow up with your request tactfully and allow enough time for their response. Only follow up with an email request if more than a week has passed without a reply.
- Send a thank-you note after they submit their letter of reference and be sure to let them know the outcome of your application.

- Try to pay it forward and keep in touch with those who help you. For example, if you read an article that is relevant to their area of focus or if you hear about a volunteer or work opportunity that would be relevant to their students, forward it to them.
- Remember that professors are not obligated to write recommendations, even if you feel that they know you well. Professors are putting their reputation on the line when providing references, which is why they may be selective about who they choose to provide a reference for.

Example Email:

Hello Dr. Singh:

I am writing to ask if you would write a letter of reference for my application to graduate programs? I have greatly enjoyed and benefited from the three classes that I have taken with you during my undergraduate degree in Adult Development. Your “Introduction to Human Services” course sparked my interest in the field of geriatric mental health, which has ultimately resulted in my goal of pursuing a master’s degree in social work.

As you can see from my attached CV and statement of intent, I have held several volunteer and paid positions in social services and have been highly involved in the campus community. I have attached a brief overview of the specific academic and research accomplishments that I am hoping you could speak to in your letter.

I am applying to three programs, and the deadline for your letter of reference would be November 1st. I understand that you may be receiving several requests for references from many students and I truly appreciate your time and consideration. Please let me know if you feel that you could provide a positive recommendation, and if so, if there is any additional information that would be helpful in writing your letter.

Sincerely,

Your Name