

Guidelines for Requesting Letters of Recommendations from the Biology Faculty

1. Firstly and most importantly, you must request your letter of recommendation at least two weeks prior to the deadline for its submission. The more time you give your instructors the better. Your instructors receive requests from numerous students to write letters of recommendation on their behalf and they should not be pressed to the wall because of your procrastination. Extenuating circumstances may arise and should be discussed with your recommender.
2. Via email, send the following items to your recommender: a) an unofficial copy of your transcript b) a current resume c) a statement of why you want to obtain a particular internship or attend graduate or professional school, and d) a list of individual programs, addresses, and DUE DATES. When applying to graduate school it is also useful to your recommender to indicate the level of degree you are seeking (MS, PhD). It is also helpful to indicate why you chose the individual to be your recommender. The obvious might be that he/she served as your SMP mentor but maybe you received a really good grade on a paper written in a class taught by the recommender. In addition, remind the recommender if he/she has previously written a letter on your behalf.
3. Most letters of recommendation are now submitted electronically and your recommender will receive an electronic prompt from the institution to which you are applying. However, a few diehards requiring hardcopy letters remain and if you are applying to one of those institutions be sure and inform your recommender of this fact and indicate the specific address to which the letter should be sent. If possible, provide a stamped, addressed envelope.
4. You will be asked by the institution to which you are applying whether you retain the right to view the letters written on your behalf or whether you waive the right to view these letters. Honesty is a very important consideration when faculty members write letters of recommendation, and some faculty members will write a different letter if they know that it will possibly be viewed by the applicant. Some might even refuse to write a letter if they know it has the possibility of being seen by the applicant. In addition, your recommendation may carry less weight if you retain the right to see it, because those reading the recommendation know how your choice to see the letter might influence its contents. Therefore, unless there are really good reasons to see the reference letter, you should waive your right to see the recommendations. Your recommender will tell you if he/she is not able to write a strong letter. If you do not waive the right to view the recommendation then you should discuss this with the recommender.
5. In general you should request that letters be sent to no more than 5 institutions. If you need more than that number you should speak to your recommender.
6. While the faculty appreciates thanks for writing on your behalf, it is a biology departmental policy that faculty not accept monetary gifts of thanks such as gift cards etc.