

Letters of Recommendation and Job Reference Tips

If you are a job seeker or applying to a graduate school or professional program, you will be asked to provide other people's assessments of your strengths and weaknesses. Current and past employers, professors, academic advisors, coaches or community leaders are good sources for providing recommendations. Job recruiters will typically contact a reference directly to obtain current and specific information via email or telephone. Graduate programs and pre-professional schools will want you to submit formal letters of recommendation. They are usually written by academic advisors, faculty, or respected persons in the field. These are confidential letters (you can't preview them) and are sent directly to the admissions committee. References for job seekers will address different things than a letters of recommendation for an academic program,

- **Choose references wisely.** Don't think about collecting generic "letters of recommendation" that are written in the past. Instead, choose someone who cares about you and knows you well who can address your strengths in the present. He/She needs to know you by name, know how to pronounce your name and really go to bat for you. Don't choose someone who has a fancy title but does not know you well.
- **Make a personal request.** Don't email your request. It is best to make an appointment with someone to discuss your plans. If this is not possible, contact them by phone. Never ask a person to be a reference, but instead ask if he/she could consider being a strong reference.
- **Be prepared.** Be able to discuss what you are applying for, how you made your decision and what your goals are. Give references as much advanced notice as possible to compose their thoughts to be communicated in writing, by email or over the phone. The more lead time, the better.
- **Provide Information.** Tell the reference what kind of information you would like them to share. If they are to write a Letter of Recommendation, be sure to send them recommendation forms, transcripts and any suggestions to help in describing your skills. Print out information about the job or program that you are applying for to help tailor the recommendation.
- **Be Neat.** Place all of your information and documentation in a folder. Mark deadlines with a sticky note. Neatness gives your reference the impression that you are both organized and motivated.
- **Heed Signals.** Notice if a person appears reluctant to write or speak on your behalf. You only want people who will offer strong support of you. If someone declines your request, be gracious. They are ultimately doing you a favor.

Find more tips from the Center for Career Development at mville.edu/careers

