HOW TO ASK FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

General: This document helps students ask for letters and advises on what materials are necessary each time you ask for a recommendation. It is your responsibility to provide your professor with all of the relevant material. In other words: give the professor detailed information, to help him/her write a strong letter on your behalf. Give as many specifics as you can, including: exactly what class(es) you took with that professor, when, what your final grade was—any projects you worked on—etc. Also include: what you intend to do and why you are the right person to do it. Don’t be afraid to blow your own horn -- this is appropriate the place to do so. Send the professor (a draft of) your statement of purpose for the professional position, goal, or grant(s). With all that, the professor can write a worthwhile letter.

I. When do I ask for the letter and whom do I ask?
As soon as you figure out that you will need letters of recommendation, make a list of possible recommenders. These should be people who know you well. If this is impossible, choose professors/managers/bosses for whom you have done superior work. You want to ask somebody who will write a good letter, so use your best judgment. Once you make your list, ask the person as soon as possible. If you rush your recommenders, you are more likely to get a letter that looks like it was put together hastily. It is to your benefit to be well organized.

II. How do I ask for a letter?
This is the area that is most difficult for people. Here are some tips:
1. Approach the professor during her/his office hours if at all possible. Explain the situation and how this job/scholarship/program applies to your professional future. Tell her/him the due date.
Example: “I would like to apply for the ‘X’ scholarship, which would help me have funding over the summer and therefore help me complete my thesis on time. I was wondering if you would be able to write a letter on my behalf? The letters are not due until a month from now.”
2. If appropriate, explain why it is that this particular professor would be a good recommender for you. This will help the person write a more explicit letter for you. Example: “You might be a good recommender in this case because I just took class with you and this class relates to what I want to study in this graduate program.”

III. What materials should I give my recommenders to help them write the letter? Checklist.
If someone agrees to write for you, indicate that you will provide the following materials (digital or print):
_____ Due date for the letter(s). (be sure to give at least two weeks advanced notice)
_____ Your current curriculum vitae or resume.
_____ Your current university transcript (unofficial, digital version is fine).
_____ A description of the program/scholarship/job for which you are applying.
_____ Recommendation forms from the grant/job agency and an envelope with stamp(s); or,
_____ Forward Arrange for the online applications information to be sent.
_____ *Statement of purpose about your goals and the program/job to which you’re applying.
_____ Your name, email, and address in case s/he wants to contact you with questions.
_____ If appropriate, offer to give the professor some sample work, if it is relevant to the grant or job or if it will help her/him to write a stronger letter. Also think about anything else—personal or professional information, for example—that would help the recommender write a stronger letter.

*The written statement (draft or complete) is important. Professors need to know why students are applying and what it is they expect to gain. Without this, their letters of recommendation can sound very generic.

Follow up to make sure the letter was sent: send the professor a reminder.
It is in your interest to follow up when the deadline nears to see whether the letter has gone out. Some professors will email you when the letter goes out, others will not. It is up to you to make sure that your materials arrive on time, so do not hesitate to approach professors politely to ask if they have written for you already. Do not bother them needlessly—just wait until about a week or ten days before the deadline and make sure that the letter went out. Then make sure that you thank your recommenders. It is appropriate and, indeed, appreciated to follow up when you hear the results. If you get the grant or job or get admitted to the program, let the recommenders know. They helped you and will be happy to know that their efforts have paid off.