My advice on who and how to ask for a letter of recommendation
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1) Think about people who can write about your different strengths (academic, work, organizational, etc.) and tailor who you ask based on the thing you are applying for. If you feel it appropriate, you can guide the writer as to the subjects you would like them to focus on.

2) Ask your professor/whomever at least 2-3 weeks in advance of the due date. This can be a bit shorter (2 weeks) if the person has already written a letter for you before. The asking can be done in person or email. Don’t be a jerk and just drop off a form under their door and expect them to do it. It’s rude and it makes them less likely to prioritize your request.

3) Don’t be embarrassed (unless you have reason to be) and don’t procrastinate. Writing letters is part of our job. However, we don’t have to do it, so be gracious and helpful and we are more likely to agree.

4) You are not their only student. Thus, you need to help them. Don’t expect them to remember everything about you – because they won’t and will only write a lukewarm recommendation with no details. If students don’t give me extra material, I will not write a letter for them. So, submit your request to them with the following material:

   a. The form – you MUST fill it out and sign it, etc. That is your job.
   b. A letter to the letter writer (in a numbered or bulleted format) that says
      • what the letter of recommendation is for (grant or grad school or job)
      • when it is due
      • what address it should be sent to
      • what additional material you are including along with the form (see below)
   c. The additional materials
      • The material you are submitting for the grant/job/grad school – this may include a CV/resume, a personal statement, a project/research proposal, etc.
      • A copy or original of the graded work you did for that person (We don’t keep copies so help us recall why you wrote a fabulous A paper)
      • Anything else that might be relevant or necessary for the person to know, including background on the grant/job/university program.
      • If you want to be really nice or they are really pressed for time, print out labels with the address on them that they can put on the envelope.
      • Finally, a few days before the postmark deadline, send them a friendly email reminding them about the letter. (“Hello Professor, I just wanted to remind you of the deadline of my letter of recommendation for X. Thank you again for writing this for me …) We are all really busy and most of us appreciate these. Some people do not like them, so ask when you give them the material if they would like you to remind them close to the due date.

5) Let them know what happens. If you got into grad school, tell them. Got the grant? Let them know. You don’t get it and you decide to take up sheep farming in New Zealand. Drop them a line. Thank them again too.