

Obtaining Good Recommendations

Most college admission professionals agree that teacher and college advisor recommendations are very important aspects of the college application file. Keeping this in mind, consider carefully the teachers you select.

When you have decided which teachers you will ask to write your recommendations, be sure you have all the forms to your teachers as soon as you receive them. Fill out your part of the form(s) before taking it to the teacher. Include a copy of your resume. Many colleges require a form called a school report or counselor's report; these go to the college advisor.

Give plenty of notice! At least two weeks prior to the request date is acceptable. Remember, a good letter of recommendation could make the difference between your being accepted at the college of your choice and your being denied acceptance.

Hand the information to the teacher or college advisor personally. Do not leave it in his/her box or depend on someone else to deliver it for you.

Before you hand out these forms, you need to consider three important issues:

- 1. Waiving your right to see material in your file.**

Many colleges give students the option of waiving their rights to see their admission files by signing a statement that frequently appears on the teacher recommendation form and on the secondary school report form. Since teachers and advisors usually feel freer to give a more accurate picture of your abilities if you waive your right to see the recommendation, many authorities on college admissions advise students to sign these waivers.

- 2. Deciding who should write your recommendation.**

Since the people you select to write your recommendations can make a difference in the way the admissions committee perceives you, it is important to choose teachers who know you, like you, and feel that they can do a good job for you.

Keep in mind that each college requests a certain number of recommendations, and that is precisely the number you should submit.

It is perfectly all right to size up your student/teacher relationship by directly asking the teacher if he or she could write a strong recommendation in support of your candidacy. If the teacher says no, or if you sense any reluctance on the teacher's part, it is best to say something like "I'll understand if you're too busy." In this way, the teacher can decline gracefully, and you can feel free to ask someone else.

If you believe a teacher would be better able to write a strong recommendation if he or she knew more about your life outside the classroom, try to arrange an appointment to discuss your activities, interests, and goals. Just be sure to approach the persons who are being asked to write these recommendations gently and with tact. Nothing will turn off a staff member faster than a pushy student.

3. Special things to consider about letters of recommendation.

Writing a college recommendation that presents an accurate and vivid portrait of a student is extremely demanding and time-consuming. The average length of time required to do a good job ranges from one and a half to two hours for each letter. Your college advisor is required to write a tremendous number of recommendations and should be given plenty of advance notice.

Request recommendations only for those three to five schools for which you are completing applications.

Make sure to tell your recommendation writers “the rest of the story,” which is your final decision about where you are going to college.

Most colleges prefer teacher recommendations from teachers who have taught you in your junior or senior year.