

## What is the best way to ask for a recommendation letter?

Check your house website for additional guides or resources. Also check out the OCS guide for medical school letters:

<http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/students/careers/medicine/applicationprocess/letters.htm>

1. Make your request in person or via email. If you send an email request, offer to come by to discuss the letter in person. Recommenders will often like to meet with you before writing a letter, especially if they do not know you very well.
2. Give your referee as much advance warning as possible to write the letter – at least 3 weeks.
3. Your referee needs information from you in order to write a good letter:
  - The name of the program/award
  - The address of the program
  - The program's website or other information about the program
  - The date and time that the letter is due
  - Instructions about how they should submit the letter
    - If the referee is to mail the letter directly, provide them with an addressed, stamped envelope.
  - Include any specific instructions provided for referees, for example:
    - What specific points should the referee address (see # 5 below)?
    - Should the envelope be signed across the seal?
  - Include any required waiver forms
  - Include any information that will help the referee to understand your motivations and interests, for example:
    - Your resume or a list of your activities and achievements
    - A copy of your application essay and/or personal statement
    - An informal description of why you are applying to this program, if you haven't discussed this in person with the referee
4. If you are applying to a number of different programs, prepare a summary of all of the programs, due dates, and other relevant information.

5. If there are any specific issues you would like your referee to address in the letter (for example, your research interests, your summer abroad experience, a weak grade in a class, etc.), it is helpful for both of you to discuss this. You can also provide them with a guide of topics to include, such as (*taken from the OCS guide*):

1. *Intellectual ability; rank as compared with Harvard and non-Harvard students, this year and/or previous years.*
2. *Follow through on assignments, rigor of academic program.*
3. *Depth of involvement and achievement in work, lab, volunteer, extracurricular activities.*
4. *Ability to communicate both in person and in writing.*
5. *Maturity, emotional stability, concern for people, problem-solving skills, tenacity in reaching goals, curiosity, creativity, capacity for leadership, self-discipline, integrity.*
6. *Response to criticism, ability to relate to others, capacity for collaborative work with others, attitudes toward supervision.*
7. *Motivation and potential for success in career.*

6. *Three days before the letter is due*, you should send a friendly email to your referee, reminding them about the due date. This can be done politely by mentioning that you are just “checking in” to see if they had any remaining questions about the letter (which is due in a couple of days). Be sure to make it clear in this reminder that you appreciate their time and efforts.

7. After the referee has completed the letter, you should send an email thanking them. If the letter means a lot to you, or if you gave the referee little notice, thank them by specially by bringing a small card, etc. (*This is not necessary if Dr. Draft or Dr. Magnotti are writing letters for you*).

8. When you find out about whether or not you got into the program, email your referee and let them know (especially if you DID get in!).