

Guidelines for Requests for Letters of Recommendation

Every academic year, faculty in the FAS write upwards of 30,000 letters for students and former students. Harvard professors take considerable time to write in detail and make every effort to present a candidate in the best possible light. Following are some suggestions to facilitate this process:

Be sure to provide at least three (preferable four or more) weeks' notice for any request. Even if you know that the instructor already has a letter on file, do not assume that it can easily be tweaked and sent out. Letters may well require significant revision to fit a particular purpose. **Never** assume that a letter can be written at the last minute. This is not only impolite; it puts unacceptable pressure on the person writing on your behalf.

Include a written statement of the due date and indicate whether it is a postmark or a receipt date.

Describe the purpose of the letter and/or provide a copy of instructions intended for the person writing. If you need multiple letters for different purposes, provide a description of each (e.g., a fellowship, a summer grant, an application for an academic job). Be sure to include the due dates and a description of how letters are to be passed forward. In many cases, institutions and dossier services will send your recommenders email messages to facilitate electronic transmission. In others, recommenders will be required to submit letters by regular mail. In this latter case, please provide an addressed and stamped envelope for each recommendation.

Provide copies of class papers and of any other directly relevant papers, with instructor's original comments if possible. It is advisable to provide a copy of your transcript (an unofficial one is fine) and a CV.

Fill out any forms as completely as you can. Do not expect the person writing for you to provide information you yourself know.

Offer to have an individual conference about the reasons for your application(s). At the very least, explain those reasons by either a written statement or a draft of your project or statement of purpose to be submitted with your application.

Make certain to fill out any waiver request, either yes or no. Please know that confidential letters will carry more weight.