

If you are considering requesting a recommendation letter from me, please read this document. It is meant to take some of the guesswork out of the process of asking me for a recommendation letter. It also makes more efficient my part in completing those letters. Not following these instructions can make the difference between a letter being written on time, or being written but not on time, or not being written at all.

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Timing

**Above all, please approach me in a way that allows time.** (JET deadlines are the most challenging in terms of the number of requests and the busy time during at which they come due. **Mid-Nov to the end of Dec is definitely my busiest recommendation letter writing season**, although up through mid-March I am writing letters nearly every week.) Last minute requests happen for various reasons. I understand that. However, even when the reason is an excellent one (and please do explain why the request is last minute) the reality is that such letters will get squeezed in between other work items and are almost never of the best quality. These days it is rare to be able just to print out another copy of a letter already done, so even if we've already worked together, last minute requests pose specific challenges. Since I tend to write letters in the order of the requests, late requests are also at or near the bottom of the stack.

BUT, when you ask very early (several months or more in advance), please stay on top of the request. I might totally forget. I don't mind being reminded or re-reminded.

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Correspondence

**Please correspond by email** and NEVER BY FACEBOOK! Email gives us a written record. It is about 100% more likely that I will remember I am doing a rec letter for you if I have an email flagged about it.

**Email me even if we have talked with each other, even if you have hadn't me documents, even if I have said I will write a letter.**

**I work from my email program and use the subject lines to do this. Your subject line must be accurate a) in order to appear in my in-box and b) in order for me to understand when it needs to be done. When generating "to do" lists and "done" lists I look ONLY at my subject line, not the email content. I do not have time to reread the content each time I review what recletters need to be done.** For example, if I count backwards 30 days from today, Nov 2, 2010, I have 90 letters in my inbox that have been exchanged between students and myself about recommendation letters. (If I did not filter and just looked a "academic related emails", I have about 500 such in the past month.) So, I don't have time to open, read, and reread you email each time I need to refresh my memory on where I am with recletters.

When you write requesting an email, please make an email subject line that looks something like the below (with '**recletter**' as one word):

firstname (the one I know) LASTNAME recletter for program, **due date (all things considered, see below), process**  
*an example:*

**"Annie CHU recletter for JET due Nov 16 2010 by form to me"**

**If "recletter" is not in the subject line, and if it is not typed as a single word, your email will not get into my in box related to recletter writing.**

**About "due date" & "process" above:** The due date is the day when you need to have in hand from me the material in order to meet your deadline, or, when I am sending the materials the post mark date or the arrival date, whichever they require. Therefore the due date in the subject line will be the actual due date when I submit electronically somewhere. Otherwise, it will be an earlier date depending on the process.

- If I submit electronically count backwards 0 days from the due date.
- If I am to postmark the letter by a certain day, count backwards 0 days from the due date unless the due date is a weekend or holiday (yes, institutions make this sort of mistake regularly).
- If I am to mail to the Bay Area, count backwards 2 days from the due date (pay attention to Sundays and holidays).
- If I am to mail to somewhere else in America, count backwards 7 days from the due date.
- If I am to mail overseas, count backwards 14 days from the due date.
- If I am to hand off to you, think about when you need the letter and think about when we will be on campus together. Be aware of weekends and holidays.
- If I am to mail to you and you are in the Bay Area, count backwards 2 days from when you need the letter (pay attention to Sundays and holidays)
- If I am to mail to you and you are elsewhere in America, count backwards 7 days from when you need the letter.
- If I am to mail to you and you are overseas, count backwards 14 days from when you need the letter.

\*\*Obviously “when you need the letter” is a huge variable in the above phrases. Give that honest and accurate consideration, and explain to me why you need it by then.

The three most common process descriptions will be something like “by form to me”, “by form to them”, “electronic submission”, or “via web site”.

**Please also locate the deadline in the body of your email in a super easy way to spot.** I often reopen emails just to double check the deadline and don’t really want to reread the whole thing to answer that one question. I know that it seems rude to highlight that part of the letter but actually not making it clear is more difficult for me.

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Content

**Please give me completed forms (and mention in your email that you have done so if possible)!** Law school applicants, for example, definitely need the **LSAC** form with the bar code on it. JET folk do, too. Every recommendation letter season I sit down to write a rec letter under a tight deadline only to see that the student has given me an entirely blank form. What name do you use when applying? I have NO idea. You haven’t signed one way or the other your right to view the letter. I can’t sign for you! You haven’t told me what program you are applying for, etc. Once we miss a work window on your rec letter it gets put **after the others** and might be another couple of weeks before something happens on it again. You can avoid this by giving me complete forms the first time around!

Then, if you can, figure out for me where I go on the web or otherwise what I do. Several programs I write for frequently are almost the same but not quite and I’m always mixing them up. So just lay it out clearly please.

**Remind me of what classes** (title or number, doesn’t matter, semester year) **you have taken with me.** And if I have written a letter in the past. This is SO helpful! I more or less know but that isn’t good enough for rec letters. I want 100% accuracy and double-triple checking (“Hmm I wonder if s/he *also* took a class with me in 2005, I better check all those rosters, too ...”) is super time consuming.

Tell me in a few sentences what you plan to do with what you are applying for.

Include resumes, project essays, etc. if you wish and if you have them but in truth generally I am asked to write letters before the students have written such essays and resumes are only helpful off and on; it sort of depends on how well I already know that student and what they are applying for .... Make a judgment call but I don’t mind more info rather than less.

**Include real contact info (cell? email? whatever it is) for those special days right around the time when a rec letter is due,** in case we hit a last minute snag and I need to reach you QUICKLY.

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### Waiver of rights to see the content of the letter

It is the student's choice whether or not to waive his or her right to read the letter that I write for them. I feel I write better letters when I don't have to visualize "double readers" (how will the admissions committee interpret this sentence? how will the student interpret this same sentence?) I feel the prose is more natural and persuasive when I can treat the admissions committee as the king/queen to whom I am talking. Also, some faculty say that letters where students have not waived their rights are taken less seriously. I have no real proof of this one way or the other but it is something to keep in mind.