

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.

The comments below are certainly not requirements, but they are welcome.

— 1 —  
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.**) 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 so 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.

— 2 —  
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 talk with each other.**

When you write requesting an email, if you can remember to do so, 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 **process**

*an example:*

**"Annie CHU recletter for JET due Nov 16 2008 by form to me"**

This gives me several ways to search for the email. (Having me see your deadline regularly is good for you, too.)

**About "process" above:** Imagine a letter is due Jan 15. That can mean a lot of things. If it is an online form, I can do it on the 14th if necessary. If it is a form I mail to the school, I like to mail it if I can a week ahead of the deadline. If it is a form I mail to you then you mail to the school, I like to mail it two weeks ahead of the deadline. If it is a form that I mail to you then you mail to the school and the school is in England or Japan or whatever, I like to mail it three weeks ahead of the deadline. So, the process of how the letter gets from me to your institution is critical knowledge to me (and you). **So "online" or "paper to me" at minimum if you can possibly provide this info.** It is so much appreciated. Please be honest in your deadlines. Setting an unreal deadline so that I write your letter before other students is definitely not a good approach.

**Please also locate the deadline in your email in a super ease 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.

## Content

**Please give me completed forms!** Law school applicants, for example, definitely need the **LSAC** form with the bar code on it.) 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.

— 4 —

### 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.