

HOW TO ASK A PROFESSOR FOR A REFERENCE LETTER

When you apply for graduate school, a job, a scholarship, or a summer research program, you will need reference letters from professors you know. To get better letters, you need to choose the right people and provide them with all the information they need to write you a good letter. If you follow these guidelines it will be easier for the professor, you will get better letters, and you will be more successful reaching your goals.

- 1. Choosing the professor.** Obviously, a professor who gave you a good grade in a class and was impressed by your academic performance would be a good choice. But to write the kind of letter that impresses the reader, the professor should also be able to comment on specific experiences as well as on your creativity and personality. Try to get involved in activities that include service and research with faculty - not only will the experiences themselves be a valuable part of your education, but also you will establish a relationship with a mentor who will be able to write a much richer letter about how you will perform in a job or research setting. First ASK the professor if they will be able to write a positive letter of recommendation. Be specific- anyone can write a letter for you, but you want a *positive* letter.
- 2. What to give the professor when asking for a reference letter.** A professor needs as much information as possible to write a letter. Give the professor all the items on this list:
 - a. Description of the position for which you are applying
 - b. Copy of your application, especially the essay you write describing why you want the position
 - c. Your transcript (or at least some grade information)
 - d. Your resume
 - e. Any forms or specific instructions or questions requested by the position for the letter of reference, including the deadline for submission of the letter
 - f. A stamped, addressed envelope (without your return address, but with room for the professor to put her return address) for submission of the letter of reference (*not necessary for letters that will be submitted electronically*)
- 3. All items can be provided electronically rather than on paper.** In fact, it would be easier for all concerned if you could email the professor items a.-e., and provide an email address or web site for submission of the letter.
- 4. Let the professor know when you hear about your application,** whether or not you got the position. This will let the professor have a good feeling of participation in your future, and will help her or him gauge future letters for you and other students.