How to Request a Letter of Recommendation

A letter of recommendation is needed for applications such as graduate schools and full time positions. Professors may be a good candidate to write a letter. The steps below (credit to [WikiHow](http://www.wikihow.com/Ask-Your-Professor-for-a-Letter-of-Recommendation-Via-Email)) can be followed to assist you in requesting a letter.

1

1. **Prepare to send request at least 4-5 weeks before the date by which the recommendation must be received**. Don't wait until the last minute to ask them. They lead busy lives, and you don't want them to rush through your recommendation.
2. **Choose an appropriate professor**. Before you choose which professor to ask for a recommendation, ask yourself how well does this professor know me? Have you ever spoken to this professor outside of class? Did this professor give you a grade of 'B' or higher in the course? Have you taken more than one course with this professor?
3. **If you are requesting a letter via email, address it properly**. Even though this is an e-mail, you want it to look nice. If you were on a first name basis (meaning they specifically asked you to call them by their first name and you did so constantly) address it by their first name. Otherwise use their appropriate title followed by a comma or a colon.
4. **Put "Recommendation for [your name]**?" as the subject line.
5. **Start the first paragraph by stating what you want**: "I am writing to ask if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me." Don't keep him or her guessing. In the next few sentences, lay out the facts:
   1. Your name
   2. Year in school
   3. Major
   4. Why you need a recommendation [that is, what you are applying for]
   5. When the recommendation letter is due
6. **Outline your relationship with the professor in a paragraph or two and point out why you have asked him or her specifically**. Tell a little about yourself in relevance to the subject and why you are interested in the scholarship, graduate program, or job for which you need the reference.
   1. Highlight relevant activities or clubs that you participated in. Describe any projects that you worked on. The more details you provide, the more the professors can work with. Attaching a resume and a transcript in the email is also beneficial. If you are requesting verbally, have copies with you to give to them then if they agree to write one.
   2. You don't want to use mundane reasons like "I want to go to this school because the degree looks really good on a resume." Be professional and say something like, "I chose to apply to this school because I am very interested in their \_\_\_ program.
   3. If your experience with this professor had any influence on your choice, say so: "I had not considered going into research until I took your cell biology class. That motivated me to get a part-time job in Dr. Jin's lab and now I'm excited about the possibility of doing stem cell research after grad school." However, don't force this if it's not true.
7. **Give them the details on the process of the letter**. Where does the letter need to be sent and by when? Give them a stamped and addressed envelope. If the professor is very busy or forgetful, offer to send the letter once they have written/sealed it within the envelope. You want to be the LEAST amount of trouble. Include this in the e-mail so they know the time frame.
8. **Close with information about how you will follow-up**: "I'll drop off the form and a stamped, addressed envelope in your faculty mailbox this week. I'll also send you an email reminder a week before the recommendation is due. Thanks again." Or, "I need to submit the letter of recommendation by August 3rd. If you're willing to write me a recommendation letter, please let me know and I'd be happy to come by your office any time to pick it up."
9. **Thank them, whether or not they write the letter**. "Thank you in advance for your time, and consideration. I also wanted to extend an additional thank you for the time I spent under your instruction. I really enjoyed your course, and I can't express how much I've taken away from Archeology 101."
10. **Follow through as promised by delivering necessary materials and sending a reminder**. Follow up the e-mail with a phone call if you haven't heard anything in a week, two at the most. If you need to call, don't assume anything. First, see if they've even seen your e-mail. If not, be prepared to do your request verbally.
11. **Before the deadline, take responsibility for checking with the scholarship program, graduate school, or prospective employer to verify that the recommendation was received**. If not, send a brief, polite email to the professor and offer to pay for overnight delivery.13
12. **Thank them again**. After you get your letter of recommendation, send a thank you note to the professor. If the recommendation is in the right hands, send the professor a hand-written thank you note via U.S. mail, not via email. If the letter does the trick and gets you the position, send a quick note to the professor to share the good news!