

Tips for requesting letters of recommendation

Professors write many letters for a number of types of positions. Here are some basic tips to increase efficiency and help you provide them with what they need to write the best possible letter. (PLEASE NOTE: the “concise resume” section, with few alterations, can also be very useful when approaching medical personnel for shadowing and volunteering activities.)

Initially requesting a letter:

1. You should make your request of a letter writer (and provide them needed materials) 6-8 weeks advance of any deadlines you may have. Prior to asking, you must have made an effort to get to know the professor because they can't really write an honest and useful evaluation for your application if they don't know you.
2. It is best to request a letter in person, in office hours. Because professors teach a lot of students, they don't always associate a face with the person emailing. If email is necessary, include a picture and be sure to tell the professor what grade you got in their class.
3. Explain what you are applying for (you may want to include any guidance your program has for letter writers), why it is important to your future goals, and when the letter is due.
4. If the professor agrees, be sure to ask if they have specific instructions to follow or if they want specific documents. (Remember professors write letters for a lot of students, so make everything as *easy as possible* for them.)

Submitting information for the letter writer:

- Some professors will have their own specific instructions. Find out what they want BEFORE sending them a bunch of emails. In general, professors want only ONE email from you with all of your materials. Professors have difficulty juggling material for many letters for many students.
- In addition to only wanting ONE document about you, professors only want to upload this letter once. Thus, if you need this letter sent to multiple places or application services or expect to need the letter in a year or two, it is best to use a letter writing service. Interfolio (<http://www.interfolio.com>) is an easy site for professors to use (it will cost you about \$19/year). All your letter writers upload to this site and then you can have the service send out confidential letters as you need them.
- Include the due date for the letter. It is recommended that you ask your letter writer to have your letter in 6-8 weeks after you provide the materials and well before the actual deadline. If you have not been notified that the letter has been received by the deadline you gave the professor, follow up promptly and often.

CONCISE RESUME SHOULD INCLUDE:

1. Your name. Your current year. What profession/position/program you are applying for (very short description here, you can expand more later). It is likely wise to add paragraphs on how you reached the decision to seek to become a healthcare professional and where, how, and why you hope to be involved in patient care one day at age 40 and/or later.
2. Include a picture of yourself. Some professors teach hundreds of students per semester, and might need a picture to ensure they have the right person.
3. Academics: What is your major? What classes and in what semesters did you have this professor? What grades did you get?
4. Copy and paste from Connect Carolina all of your courses and grades. Highlight this professor's course. Professors like to see what kind of student you are overall. And, they might like to see what else you took while you took their class.
5. Write a paragraph telling what specific aspects of **your association with the professor** you would like him or her

to elaborate on in the letter. Describe situations where they observed the traits/attributes that you expect them to describe in the letter. *(Examples: We had a great chat during office hours about the development of your critical thinking skills in independent research, you worked on a mission trip abroad where you demonstrated your fundamental caring for others about which we talked at length, we worked together on a committee where you demonstrated your collaborative spirit and your adherence to detail and deadlines).* If you can't think of interactions where you demonstrated attributes of value in an evaluation, it's unlikely they will be able to! This is probably the most important part of what you send to your letter writer. You should think of attributes, important to your program of choice, which you have demonstrated to this professor. Some writers ask that reflect on your educational experiences at Carolina in a way that explains the aspects of those experiences that led you to ask for a letter. They may not remember the specific paper you wrote or project you completed without your reminder.

6. Give more detailed information describing **what** you are applying for and at least one paragraph telling **why** this position appeals to you. Be sure to include the names of institution(s)/programs you are applying for. *(Examples: UNC Study Abroad program in London, Research Experience for Undergraduates at the University of Arizona)*
 7. Describe how the professor was able to observe these qualities that you would like him or her to write about.
 10. List any other information that would be helpful for to include that gives your application context *(i.e. I had a medical issue in my third semester, I am a transfer student and I found the transition to UNC Biology difficult because, I am from rural NC, I am a first generation student and not a native English speaker).* Including any reflections on summer experiences or other extra-curricular activities may be helpful here.
 11. List any standardized test scores you have any to report and paste any personal statement (single spaced). A rough draft may be fine for the purpose of professors getting to know you better and to see what else accompanies your application. They may also have suggestions about your personal statement.
 12. **Clearly list where the letter needs to go.** (Some programs will send each recommender an email with the link to upload letters. Others have a link but the requesting student must provide identifying information for appropriate uploading.) **And**, if you think you might need this **letter sent to multiple places** or you might need it in a year or two from now, then you should use **Interfolio (\$19/year at <http://www.interfolio.com>).**
- **Note: Be sure to sign the line that indicates you WAIVE your right of access to the letter. If you do not waive your rights to read the letter and forms, then the honesty of the letter will be in doubt. The letters and forms have little credibility if they are not confidential.**
13. Include your email and phone contact in case the professor needs anything else from you. If you do not have a confirmation by the date you have given as a deadline, it is your responsibility to follow up with the professor to remind them of the deadline. Managing many students' due dates is difficult for professors.

After the letter has been submitted:

Remember to keep in touch by letting the letter writer know if/when you get into the program, so you can thank them. You can thank them in person, by formal (snail-mail) thank you note, or by email. Once in the program, you may want to send them an update since it is likely they continue to be interested in your progress.