



Letters of Recommendation

(Information gathered from findaid.org)

This article provides advice on getting a good letter of recommendation. The teachers and other people you ask to write you a letter of recommendation will be presenting you to the selection committee. They will be comparing you to other students they have taught and past recipients of the award. These comparisons will help the selection committee understand whether they should select you as a winner.

- **Seek good letters of recommendation.** When asking people to write you a letter of recommendation, ask them if they can write you a *good* letter of recommendation. You should pick people who can not only write well, but write well about you. If they seem uncomfortable with the idea of writing a letter of recommendation for you, ask them to suggest someone else who might be a better choice.

Choose people who are relevant to the sponsor's goals. For example, ask a science teacher to write a letter of recommendation for a science scholarship, not your English teacher. All else being equal, it is better to ask someone who has known you longer and who is more impressed by your qualifications. Depending on the nature of the scholarship program, you should consider asking your teachers or professors, your employer, your coach, the director of a community service activity where you volunteered your time, and anybody who knows you well. Never, however, ask a family member to write a letter on your behalf.

The purpose of the letter of recommendation is to provide the selection committee with third-party documentation and validation of your background. They want to read the opinion of someone who is familiar with your background and knows you well. It is even better if they can compare you with other students, especially students who have won the award previously.

Provide the recommender with a stamped and addressed envelope and any required forms. It is also helpful to provide them with a summary of the purpose of the award. Ask him or her to write the letter at least four weeks before it is due. Gently remind them ten days before the deadline, asking them whether they have sent in the recommendation or need more information from you. Send the writer a thank you note after the letter's been mailed. In all likelihood you will ask them to write additional letters for you. Once they've written one letter on your behalf, the second letter is much easier. If you send them a thank you, it will give them a good impression and make them more willing to spend time writing you additional letters in the future.

- **Create an accomplishments resume.** An accomplishments resume is a summary that lists of all your accomplishments, both academic and extracurricular. You will find it helpful to refer to it as your complete applications, to ensure that you do not omit any relevant aspects of your background.

You should provide a copy of your accomplishments resume to the people who will be writing letters of recommendation for you. Even people who have known you for a long time may not be familiar with all of your accomplishments, and the resume can help jog their memory. They will also be able to incorporate details from your resume into their letters, making it seem like they know you better than they do. The resume will also help save them time when they are writing your letter. Writing a good letter takes time, so anything you can do to make this process easier will help.